The English Aristocracy, Its Crises, and the English Revolution, 1558-1660

"A landmark in the historical landscape" – *The Economist*; "A major contribution . . . an impressive achievement, which must in future put all historians in his debt" – *The Listener*; "A remarkable achievement . . . an outstanding study of a very real and great value" – *History*; "A mammoth and marvellous book" – *American Historical Review*; "Immense value" – *English Historical Review*; "A model" – *Journal of Economic History*; "A major historical contribution . . . a magisterial and seminal work" – *Journal of Modern History*; "A brilliant and original contribution" – *New York Review of Books*; "Social history at its absolute best" – *Past and Present.*

Such was the chorus of critical encomium that greeted the publication of Lawrence Stone's *Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641.* Despite the chorus Stone could hardly have helped being disappointed at the actual reviews. One or two were almost as fatuous as they were brief. Others, sensible within their limits, were still too short. This seems to have been the fault of editors, so intimidated by the pejorative sense of the term "discrimination" that they refuse to discriminate between a work worth more than twenty pages and one worth less than twenty words, performing their editorial duties in the matter of book reviews with a sort of timorous and lunatic egalitarianism. Moreover, in considering Stone's work, many of the reviewers hastily plunged into what has come to be called "the gentry controversy" or "the storm over the gentry," and some became almost totally immersed in it.[1] This tendency is unfortunate because so much of what Stone wrote stands on a base quite independent of its ultimate relation to that area of high historiographic turbulence and deserves attention simply on its own merits. Only three reviewers were given anywhere near enough space to do justice to the most important work on the period from the accession of Elizabeth I to the Great Rebellion written in the past quarter century or longer. In consequence of the ancient rancor of unappeased academic feuds and out of a certain condescension among economic historians, two of

1. Esp. John Kenyon, "Decline and Fall," *New York Review of Books*, July 7, 1966, pp. 23-24; D. C. Coleman, "The 'Gentry' Controversy and the Aristocracy in Crisis, 1558-1641," *History*, LI (1966), 165-74.

the three spent most of their time carping, sometimes justly, sometimes trivially, at Stone's inferences from a small cluster of his statistics. The exception to all these strictures – and it is a notable exception – is G. E. Aylmer's thoughtful and perceptive review in *Past and Present.*[2]

The intent, then, in what follows is somewhat to redress a corporate injustice by historians to a great piece of history writing; and this requires a doing of justice, a rendering to Stone's book of what is clearly its due, and at the same time a making explicit of several reservations, doubts, and questions. Why then is *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* "an original contribution," "a seminal work," "a milestone," "a landmark," and a great monument?

If one is to find an answer to this question, the first step is to ask what substantively the book seeks to do. Mainly it seeks to cope with three questions:

1. What was the way of life of the English aristocracy between about the middle of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth century? What was the "total environment of [this] *élite*,"[3] and in what respects and to what extent did it change between about 1558 and about 1641?

2. What was the economic condition of the English peers during this period? What ups and downs did they suffer individually and collectively – how high up, how far down, and when?

3. How did it come about that in the early seventeenth century the leadership of concerted opposition to the actions of the ruler, exercised by English peers and magnates in the Middle Ages, fell to men about one step down on the social pyramid – the parliamentary gentry and lawyers?[4]

Stone's heart is so set on finding answers to the second and third questions that he refers to the answer to the first as a "secondary object." In doing so he greatly undervalues his most remarkable achievement. It is no depreciation of his very serious effort to

2. G. E. Aylmer, *Past and Present*, No. 32 (1965), 113-25; see also the briefer, skillful review by Edward Miller, "The Elizabethan and Early Stuart Peerage," *Historical Journal*, IX (1966), 133-36.

3. Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965), p. 7.

4. The key words here are "concerted opposition to the actions of the ruler." This phrase is intended to eliminate localized and uncoordinated revolts of peasants and other social groups. What is being pointed at is not so much the Civil War itself but the activities both in Parliament and in the country during the preceding twenty-one years, which along with the actions of James I, Charles I, and their officials and courtiers were constitutive of the situation from which the Civil War resulted. My three-point analysis of *Crisis of the Aristocracy* diverges slightly from Stone's own two-point analysis to make possible what I believe to be a more satisfactory account of what he has done. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

answer all three questions to say that in his handling of the first question, he is most successful. Some of what he says on the second and third questions may be subject to qualification, and he defines the answer to the third question in a way that in part puts that answer out of his reach.[5] His reconstruction of the patterns of life of a social group, "the aristocracy," over a period of almost a hundred years, however, is surely not surpassed in the historical literature of any country in the world.[6]

I

Stone's remarkable effort "to describe in as much detail as can reasonably be tolerated the way of life"[7] of the English aristocracy entailed much more than a narrow historical description of the outlook and activities of a small cluster of men; or rather, to his credit, he saw it as entailing much more than that. Those activities impinged directly on other centers of activity in England — the ruler and the central government, the business community, the schools, the law, the lesser landed classes and the tenantry, and so on. Moreover, the shifting self-image of the aristocracy and the shifting image of it entertained by others were integral elements in the social cosmologies and cosmogenies, not always wholly self-consistent, sometimes rather sharply divergent and not entirely stable, which contemporary Englishmen saw as the legitimate regulators of the relations of the lesser communities that jointly composed the whole commonwealth. In *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, responding to this complexity, Stone does not merely present a portrait of a cluster of men, their outlook, and their activities. While the figures of the men in that cluster stand at the center of his vast canvas, they are figures in a landscape, and that landscape is English society and culture from about the accession of Elizabeth I to the outbreak of the Civil War. While he paints his cluster of

5. See below, pp. 70-71.

6. It is touched by one small bias that readers might keep in mind. In his category of "the aristocracy" Stone includes the rich gentry, some five hundred families in 1640, as well as the peerage. Much of his nonquantitative data, however, centers around the court and courtiers, and almost all of his quantitative data have to do only with the peerage. Proportionately the peerage was more heavily represented at court than the upper gentry were. Thus 25 per cent of the peerage held office between 1625 and 1642 as against 12 per cent of the knights. G. E. Aylmer, *The King's Servants* (London, 1961), p. 324. Since, however, peerage is hereditary, a considerable number of peers were too young to be courtiers, thus increasing the disproportion. Therefore, the available evidence and Stone's book provide a less distorted image of the peers' way of life than of the five hundred gentry families, except for the comparatively small proportion of the latter who were also courtiers.

7. Stone, *Crisis*, p. 8.

figures with elaborate and careful (though not always loving) detail, in doing so he often brings into brilliant relief traits of the landscape that few historians had observed before and none observed so well. So abundant and richly textured is Stone's work in this respect that no review can do it more than scant justice. Given the scope of the activities of the aristocracy, each of which Stone resolutely tracks down, investigates, and explains, merely to list those activities would produce a series impressive in its length but both tiresome and unenlightening. The details of a specific instance may more adequately illuminate and pinpoint some of the peculiar excellences of *The Crisis of the Aristocracy.*

An instance superficially most unpromising is that of the beneficial lease.[8] A legal instrument for letting land, it is one of those technical devices of estate management which offer so little probability of interest and so high a promise of dreariness that lesser historians tend to render them bewildering and stultifying by lack of imagination or to avoid them in fear of a boring outcome. Not Stone. He resolutely plunges in and wrestles with the difficulty. In the end he achieves a model essay in the social history of law. The beneficial lease was the most common instrument for leasing land during the time span that concerns him, and during that span landlords aimed to replace copyhold with leasehold. The beneficial lease divided the tenants' liability between a lump sum payment at the outset, called the entry fine, and an annual rent fixed for the duration of the lease. The principal negotiable terms of such a lease were its duration and the apportionment of payments between entry fine and annual rent. From the point of view of both landlord and tenant, the worst duration was an uncertain one of considerable probable length. Such a lease prevented adjustments of rent to movements of prices, so that one party to the lease or the other was likely to be painfully squeezed by long-term price movements. If to the blind bet on price changes was added uncertainty as to the actual duration of the lease, the gamble would be compounded and the incentive to prudence minimized. Over a large part of England, however, the beneficial lease was made for three lives; it terminated with the death of the last of three parties named in the lease. Such an arrangement might run a very long while or a fairly short one, but in an age at once violent, harsh, and unhygienic, it was as uncertain as the uncertainties of life itself. The lease for lives thus maximized disutilities for both parties.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 313-17.

Similarly, the worst division of entry fine and annual rent for both parties was the heavy fine and the low rent. It encouraged improvidence on both sides, leading the landlord to gamble on a quick recurrence of the windfall of an entry fine and the tenant on its long postponement. It tempted the landlord to accept disadvantageous terms for the sake of ready money, and the heavy initial outlay deprived the tenant of the capital for improvement of his holding, improvement for which the lease for lives with its uncertain duration of tenure gave him little incentive. Yet in the period Stone studies, landlord and tenant alike preferred an increase in entry fine to an increase in rent. Thus the actual beneficial lease was a topsy-turvydom in which all parties seemed stubbornly set on doing the worst for themselves. In making this piling up of irrationalities intelligible, Stone shows himself at his best. The arrangement suited great landlords because for unforeseen contingencies – marriage portions, building costs, and so on – it enabled them to lay hands on ready cash otherwise hard or expensive to come by, because the large initial investment of the tenant gave the landlord a reasonably good security for the regular payment of the agreed rent for the duration of the lease, and because for each individual landlord the immediate tangible gain of a lump sum had strong attractions, not sufficiently offset by a gradually accruing net loss which, after all, would like as not fall on his heirs rather than on him. He was thus not strongly moved to preserve his successors from inconveniences that he himself had suffered by the like doings of his predecessors. Or as Stone puts it in one of the sparkling and shrewd asides that illuminate his book: "Like flogging in public schools, the beneficial lease was an institution in the perpetuation of which its former victims always ended by acquiring a vested interest."[9] On the tenants' side, Stone's explanation of an ultimately irrational preference is even more perceptive. Obscuring any long-term economic calculations of gain or loss was the tenants' whole "vision of life on earth," into which the uncertainty in dimension and timing of the fines nicely fitted.

> When man is at the mercy of disease and the weather, in health today, crippled or dead tomorrow, gorged today and starved tomorrow, with money to burn today from the sale of a bumper crop, plunged into debt tomorrow because of harvest failure, the human condition is one of perpetual flux. The beneficial lease was just one more card in a large pack

9. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

> of jokers, and leaseholders and the customary tenants positively preferred a few years of misery and hardship while the fine was being paid, followed by a long period at a low rent, to the regular payment of a reasonable annual sum.[10]

Now this is history writing in the grand manner. It is also history writing in the old-fashioned manner. Stone makes visible a revelatory pattern between a legal instrument or device and the social and cultural context in which it flourished. He is able to make it visible because an enormously wide reading of the records of the period has rendered him aware of what that culture and society were like. His exposition manifests that rare historical tact characteristic of the work of the greatest of English historians, Frederic W. Maitland.

Stone does this sort of thing not just once but half a hundred times at least in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*. He thus gives their intelligible place in the intricate fabric of social relations, in the pattern of culture of the period, to the passion for fancy dress, to pedigree peddling, to gambling and heiress hunting, to the arranged aristocratic marriage, to the temptations and terrors of the mortgage before Chancery created the equity of redemption, to the impact of the accurate survey on the management of large estates, to those potlatches of building, feasting, and funerals in which aristocrats blew not only income but capital assets in orgies of mutual emulation – the list could go on and on. Nor is the final effect static. Stone has succeeded in doing what anthropologists who deal in patterns of culture often fail to do: he examines a society (or a section of a society) in flux, acted on by forces external to it and reacting on them, so that the reader can observe a society not in an artificially frozen posture but in the process of dynamic adjustment (and turmoil); and he renders understandable specific changes by relating them to the social context in which they were generated. Thus, for example, having described the large number of converging circumstances that were restricting the wonted propensity of members of the aristocracy to hasty violence, he turns to describe the charms for them of that moral or at least quasi-pacific equivalent of private war, litigation. A really protracted lawsuit

> would with its complexity and prolixity consume their time, their energies, and their substance for years and years on end. The very deficiencies in the machinery of the law, its great cost, its appalling slowness, its obsession with irrele-

10. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

> vant technical details, made it an admirable instrument for the sublimation of the bellicose instincts of a leisured class. Sixteenth-century litigation combined the qualities of tedium, hardship, brutality, and injustice that tested character and endurance, with the element of pure chance that appealed to the gambler, the fear of defeat and ruin, and the hope of victory and the humiliation of the enemy. It had everything that war can offer save the delights of shedding blood. It gave shape and purpose to many otherwise empty lives. Litigation, therefore, remained the most popular of indoor sports, despite unanimous agreement upon the folly of such behaviour and the rapacity of lawyers.[11]

Stone's vivid sense of what the way of life and the milieu of the aristocracy were like enables him to correct archaic stereotypes about both the peerage and the greater gentry, and then to go further and correct recent corrections of those stereotypes. One of the most tired clichés about the Tudor-Stuart peerage has been that it was "feudal" and therefore, practically by definition, inimical to the "progressive" economic innovations and activities of the (by now somewhat scaled down) "first industrial revolution" from 1540 to 1640. Faint intimations that this view of the matter did injustice to the facts began to emerge almost twenty years ago.[12] Since that time awareness and documentation of the role of the aristocracy as a source, and often the most important source, of supply of investment capital for industrial enterprise not only in England but throughout northern Europe have sharply increased. Stone contributed heavily to that awareness and documentation for England in a study which, revised and expanded, has become chapter vii, "Business," of *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*.[13] That chapter makes it clear that in the sixteenth century in England neither bourgeois capitalists nor even the rising gentry, but the English nobility,[14] assumed the greatest share of the risks involved in industrial innovation, with George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, the richest of Elizabethan peers and one of ancient lineage, far out in front of the pack.[15] In this Shrewsbury was paradigmatic rather than eccentric. It was the pre-Stuart peers rather than the risingest of the middle class of rising gentry, those

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 241-42.
12. See the earliest version of J. H. Hexter, "Myth of the Middle Class in Tudor England," read at the American Historical Association, Dec. 1948, and published in *Explorations in Entrepreneurial History*, II (1950), 128-40.
13. Initially L. Stone, "The Nobility in Business, 1540-1640," *The Entrepreneur* [Economic History Society] (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 14-21.
14. Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 338-55, esp. pp. 343, 348, 352.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

whom James I and Charles I ennobled, who were most forthcoming with venture capital for long-term investment in industrial enterprises.[16] Here and elsewhere in his book Stone more than fully justifies his flat dictum, "There was nothing particularly feudal about the peers in 1641."[17] At the same time his intimate awareness of the activities, the aspirations, and the attitudes of the nobility secures him against the anachronism opposite to that of envisioning them as feudal lords: that of viewing them as businessmen. Many of them were unmistakably *in* business; businessmen they were not, although a study confined to their business activities might tend to create that illusion. The wide sweep of Stone's vision prevents him from falling into error on this score and from passing the error on to his readers.[18] What concerned most of the peers most constantly was the advancement of themselves and their families in prestige and wealth. In its command of their time and energy, and perhaps in its potential for yielding the advancement they sought, "business" ran a bad fourth to office at court, marriage, and estate management.

Still while all this is new and fresh in substance, it is not particularly newfangled or new-fashioned in form or (to submit to current jabberwocky) in methodology. But Stone prides himself, and rightly, on being new-fashioned in precisely this respect. In his investigation of the way of life of the aristocracy, what in his view is new-fashioned? First, a consistent concern with statistical data; second, an openness to insights provided by the social sciences. How he usually deploys these new weapons is perhaps best seen in chapter iii on "The Inflation of Honours."

First, as to statistics. On the inflation of honors Stone provides statistical tables on the distribution of honors from the bottom rung of the ladder up – first into the ranks of the gentry through grant of arms, then to knighthood, baronetage, and the degrees of peerage. The tables show the numbers admitted to the various ranks of honor over approximately equal periods of time from about 1558 to 1641.[19] Because grants of arms were not controlled by the ruler but by the College of Heralds, which had a financial

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 378-80.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 382-84.
19. With the following differences: grants of arms are tabulated over ten-year periods, 1560-1639 (*ibid.*, App. II, p. 754); quantitative data for esquires are not available; higher ranks are tabulated over five-year spans; an exception in tabulation is made for the first two and three-quarter years of James I, the special circumstances of which resulted in an eccentrically profuse creation of knights and, to a lesser extent, of peers (*ibid.*, App. III, p. 755).

interest in peddling them, the available statistics on admission to the gentry are ambiguous and in any case unenlightening with respect to the policy of the Crown. It is the statistics on newly granted honors of knighthood, of baronetcy, and of peerage in its various grades that reveal crown policy, since such grants required royal sanction, direct or indirect.[20] Here the rough outlines of policy are easy to discern. Throughout her reign Elizabeth was at least as closefisted about honors as she was about money. She made so few knights that, because the honor was not heritable, their number probably fell as much as 50 per cent between her accession and 1583. She even permitted the ranks of the hereditary peerage to undergo some small depletion from fifty-seven at her accession to fifty-five at her death. From the accession of James I to the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham, the Elizabethan policy is reversed; in every category of honors directly granted by the ruler, the inflation is on. Throughout Elizabeth's reign the creation of knights averaged about twenty a year, and this included the 170 men knighted by the Earl of Essex, almost half of them on the Irish expedition in defiance of the Queen's prohibition. From the accession of James to 1630, the total creations shot up to almost three thousand, a more than fivefold increase in the rate of knightings per year. From 1630 to the summoning of the Long Parliament, creations fell back to about the Elizabethan rate.[21] As to peers, Elizabeth made only eighteen, less than one every two years, as against eighty-four from 1603 to 1630, almost eight times the Elizabethan rate. Moreover, while Elizabeth maintained a fairly steady ratio of one earl to two barons in the House of Lords, by 1628 there were about four earls for every three barons.[22] Piled on top of the population explosion in ancient honors between 1603 and 1630 was the exploitation of new ones — threescore Irish peerages[23] and the whole baronetage, an invention of James I. From 1611 to 1630 almost three hundred men acquired the title of baronet for their families, all for a price.[24] Finally, as in the case of knighthoods, Charles sharply constricted the grants of other honors in the eleven years of personal rule. Such was the curve of creation. What of the price?

20. The knights created by the 2nd Earl of Essex as commander of the Cadiz expedition of 1596 and of the Irish expedition of 1599 are an exception to this rule.
21. From 1631 through 1640, 22.4 p.a.
22. Sixty-five earls; forty-seven barons.
23. Not wholly new, but in her whole reign Elizabeth had created only three.
24. Actually 292. This figure excludes more than one hundred Irish and Scottish baronetcies.

In general, honors controlled by Elizabeth were literally priceless; they were not for sale. But Stone has enough scattered documentation of fact and rumor on honor-price under the early Stuarts to indicate the curve that it followed: baronetcy – £1095 in 1611, £700 in 1619, £220 in 1622, less than £200 about 1628; barony – £10,000 in 1615, £8000 in 1624, £6600 in 1628.[25]

The statistics are simple enough. What of their interpretation? Here Stone turns to the other social sciences, and first to economics. The exercise is not intricate. Since like modern paper money the necessary certificates of honor can be inexpensively produced at the ruler's command, once honors become venal, the temptation and pressures to flood the market with them are very strong.[26] The oversupply of titles of honor, however, reduces their exchange value. From a fiscal point of view the rate of profits on sales of honor declines with the glut of creations. Beyond this simple-minded economic analysis lie questions calling for social analysis. In a society like that of Jacobean England, what are the social implications of the inflation of honors? The actual impact of the market in honors between 1603 and 1628 could scarcely have been worse than it was. For English society was status-bound, and powerfully status-conscious, built on "degree, priority and place." The observance of precedence and deference and acceptance of their legitimacy guaranteed social stability. The situation created by James and Buckingham whetted men's appetites for the gratification that any considerable upward shift in their own status would afford them. At the same time the overrapid shifts in the precedence men had hitherto enjoyed were certain to produce a revulsion, a sense that legal status coincided ill with legitimate rank. The effect of the long Elizabethan dearth was to create a backlog of demand for honors that might have seemed insatiable. Nevertheless, in their readiness to supply the market for a price, James and Buckingham did in fact succeed in depreciating the

25. Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 93, 116.

26. Stone refrains from considering the implications of the egregious slump in baronetcy prices and the widespread unwillingness to accept knighthood at any price or no price at all, compared with the relative if more stable prices for peerages in the very late 1620s. The divergence at least suggests that the differential in price movement, the unevenness of the inflation, resulted from the situation on the demand rather than the supply side. It is what one might expect if, as Stone himself suggests elsewhere, legal innovations, reforms in estate management, and improved access to credit were of advantage principally to the greatest gentry landlords and not very readily accessible to the lesser. The improved economic position of the great landlords may have supported prices at the higher levels of honors-buying, while an economic pinch and an excessive supply ruined the market for honors at the lower levels.

money value of honors. Worse, by their indifference to the social viability of the persons on whom they bestowed honors, they severely shook a social system of which a widely acceptable structure of honor and an acceptable dynamic of progression in status were important stabilizing elements.

Both in the use of statistics and in the use of related social sciences, Stone's chapter on "The Inflation of Honours" is exemplary for the entire historical craft. With respect to statistics his decennial and quinquennial tables of grants and honors provide hard-core data for analysis. They accurately relate the "how many?" to the "when?" They thus make it possible to replace with categorical assertion the sort of waffling that historians are driven to, when in matters involving the relation of quantity to chronology they do not know "how many," either because they have been unable to find out or because they have been too dainty or lazy or remiss to count. At the same time Stone avoids that other and reverse sort of daintiness which afflicts the new puritans of economic history, the econometricians, who so fear contamination by figures less precise and refined than annual price series that their output becomes as sterile as their input, but in a different sense. Stone's quantitative data on honor-price, while less tidy than one might wish, are good enough to permit a hypothesis and, *along with qualitative data*, good enough to lend that hypothesis support. Thus in the instance under consideration, the statements about the effect of the cheapening of honor by the House of Commons in their impeachment of Buckingham and the rueful analyses with which in the 1650s royalists tried to account for the disasters of monarchy serve to corroborate the surmise that the quantitative data suggest.[27]

Stone's own explicit statements about the use of statistics occasionally are opaque and ambivalent, though not perhaps mutually contradictory.[28] A man who performs, however, is entitled to be judged on the basis of his actual performance rather than on his statements of method and intent. In *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*

27. Stone, *Crisis*, p. 120.

28. For example, "Statistics . . . compose the bony skeleton of this book. . . . This statistical frame is as necessary to the book as the bone structure to a vertebrate; without them both would be inert lumps of amorphous flesh." *Ibid.*, p. 3. "Statistical measurement is the only means of extracting a coherent pattern from the chaos of personal behaviour and of discovering which is a typical specimen and which a sport." *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4. "Statistics make a dry and unpalatable diet unless washed down with the wine of human personality. They have been used, therefore, merely as controls to check the significance of the tangled jetsam of anecdote and quotation thrown up by three talkative, quarrelsome, idiosyncratic generations of noble men and women." *Ibid.*, p. 4.

one occasionally can turn up a performance that is also ambivalent. It starts with a modest appraisal of the weight of the statistics which follow. Then come the statistics themselves, and finally a dictum in which, despite his earlier judicious commitment to a modest appraisal of the value of his quantitative evidence, Stone lands with a great thump and all his weight on one side of the scale, the one in accord with his general views.[29] To anyone who has tried to sweat statistical data out of mean, niggardly, unyielding sources of supply, the psychodynamics of this process will be familiar enough. Having gone through an agonizing process to come up with any quantities at all, one finds it hard to believe that their value is actually proportional only to their relevance to the argument in hand and not to the energy invested in the effort of producing them. Given the great masses of statistics that Stone has quarried out of meager veins in unauspicious places, the wonder is not that his control occasionally slips, but that it slips so rarely, and that his own evaluations of his quantitative data so frequently correspond to those of readers whose pleasure in criticizing them is unalloyed by any of the pains involved in digging them out. By and large in his dealing with statistics, he is a paragon of openmindedness, ready to use them for about what they are worth in particular cases, uninhibited either by the humanistic snobbishness of those who in the period of their gestation as historians appear to have absorbed a prenatal dread of numbers or by the scientific priggery which conceives that a pure worship of quantities is not only an adequate but a necessary surrogate for historical understanding and imagination. He never lets himself be lured into the silly trap of opposing quantification to the other modes of advancing historical knowledge in face of the manifest fact that those modes sometimes work badly apart from quantification and often work well together with it.

For historians Stone's way with the other social sciences as illustrated in "The Inflation of Honours" and with great frequency elsewhere in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* is also exemplary. Again one had best look for that way in his actions rather than his affirmations and not be put off by his early pledge of allegiance to a "sociological interpretation of historical causation," whatever that may be. In practice Stone is no renegade turning his back on history to worship at the shrines of the Baalim of social science.

29. For criticism of some of Stone's inferences from his statistics, see esp. Aylmer, *Past and Present*, No. 32, 113-25; Coleman, "'Gentry' Controversy," *History*, LI, 165-74; anonymous review, *T.L.S.*, Apr. 17, 1966, pp. 285-88.

Quite the contrary. As the old Church Fathers would have pointed out, he is engaged in the operation, so congenial to the Elect, of "plundering the Egyptians." As the Chosen People robbed the Pharaonic kingdom of whatever they deemed good, and as the Fathers themselves took what they found valuable from classical culture and put it to the service of the Lord, so without compunction and in a most eclectic manner, Stone takes from the economists, the sociologists, the social psychologists, or the anthropologists whatever at any particular point in his investigations seems useful and turns it to the purposes of history. On the Marxians, the Freudians, the Weberians, and the Paretans, on Veblen and Malinowski, Schumpeter and C. Wright Mills, on Aron and Titmuss, he levies tribute with fine impartiality. That at the level of meta-social science the systematic structures created by those he draws on are quite incompatible and irreconcilable one with the other, that they are the occasions of fierce party wars to the death among their adherents, does not bother Stone at all; this incompatability does not diminish the utility of the insights imbedded in those structures for illuminating the life-style of the early modern English aristocracy. If Stone's free and easy way of deploying conceptions from the social sciences in historical analysis induces *frissons* of horror among the faithful band of "pure" historians for whom social scientists are as the unclean, his free and easy way of picking up and using these concepts probably inflicts an equivalent dismay on the purer social scientists. Indeed the only thing to be said for his procedures is that usually they work and that for historians they are the only ones that most of the time do work.[30] This is what happens in the case of "The Inflation of Honours." The general economic notion of the operations of supply and demand for goods in the market is loosely applied to titles of honor, and then by examining the impact of the inflation on the status-oriented, deferential, and traditional society of seventeenth-century England, Stone moves the whole argument from the domain of economic analysis into that of social (or sociological) analysis. Whether or not social scientists would approve of such uninhibited methods, in the case under consideration historians have found the results unreservedly enlightening.[31]

30. This is not to decry or deny the possible utility of an effort, by historians so inclined, to apply highly systematized structures of social-science generalization to specific historical situations with a view to testing the generalizations rigorously. *Chacun à son gout.*

31. As far as I have been able to determine, "The Inflation of Honours" has enjoyed the unanimous if occasionally grudging approval of all the reviewers who mention it.

What Stone achieves in connection with honors, he achieves again and again elsewhere in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* in dealing with aristocratic habits of consumption, with life at court and the pursuit of office and favor, with the shifting pattern of parental authority over the marriage of heirs and heiresses, and above all in the magnificent chapter on "Power," where he traces the processes and policies by means of which the descendants of and successors to the turbulent magnates of the mid-fifteenth century were transformed into the peaceful aristocrats of the seventeenth. Whenever possible, Stone follows the same sound general recipe for getting the most for his efforts, combining old-fashioned historical methods and newfangled social science notions with an offhand disregard for any sort of orthodoxy. It does not work every time; but it gets results so often as to defeat captious critics, and it certainly enables him to attain his first objective – to present a study in depth of a social group, rich in detail and abundant in insight.

Beyond and above his methods of investigation, Stone brings to *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* qualities of mind and character without which mere method would have yielded little. Of those qualities only one seems to have created any difficulties for him. He is at heart a man of intellectual-academical-Puritanical-Jacobinical temper, the temper of the meritocrat, which is constitutionally averse to those who owe a privileged place in society to riches, birth, fortune, and favor rather than to personal achievement, mental prowess, hard work, and devotion to a calling. For such a man any hereditary aristocracy, even the relatively serious and serviceable aristocracy that he is concerned with, is somewhat hard to take. With rare self-knowledge and engaging candor he early makes explicit both his bias and his own doubts of its soundness,[32] but like most people convinced against their will, in less guarded moments he remains of the same opinion still. That opinion affects the rhetoric of his statements even when it does not touch their logic. Thus the idleness of the aristocracy receives frequent emphasis in face of evidence that service, civic concern, and public activity, not wholly self-regarding, had gotten amalgamated into the value structure of the aristocrats, and into the actual pattern of life of a considerable number of them.[33]

In fact the situation in this matter is more ambivalent than the

32. Stone, *Crisis*, pp. 6-7.

33. Thomas, 3rd Earl of Sussex, and Henry, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, to name two outstanding examples of the Elizabethan period.

rhetoric congenial to Stone's bias permits it to appear. Occasionally the vocabulary of his bias even triumphs over some of his hard-earned statistics, nowhere more so than in the matter of the marriages of peers. Thus with respect to the quest of peers for heiresses to marry in the early seventeenth century, he ascribes the grumbling it occasioned to people's thinking back to an age "when the preservation of class distinctions took precedence over the quest for optimum financial benefits."[34] In the most sensitive area – acquiring gold to brighten poverty-tarnished aristocratic blazons by noble marriages to city heiresses – he speaks of a "new trend" beginning about 1591 and ending in 1599 in which "a few bolder . . . spirits . . . began to leap across the barrier that . . . divided peers from merchants."[35] Yet on the basis of the statistics Stone himself provides, none of this seems to amount to very much. The "trend" actually produced just one marriage of a peer to a city heiress; there were just two such marriages in the fifty-seven years between 1561 and 1618 as against five in the twenty-one years between 1540 and 1561, a decline of 700 per cent. Between 1540 and 1660, 91 per cent of all peers' marriages were into the families of gentry or other peers; and in each of the four thirty-year periods composing the 120-year span, the deviation from the 91 per cent median was never more than 1 per cent. The one possibly significant figure is an increase of marriages to heiresses from about 20 per cent to 34 per cent as between the first two and the second two quarters of that span. Even here some of the apparent differences may result from the superior density of information on the women that peers married from 1600 on.[36] Still, with respect to the way of life of the aristocracy, Stone's slips into a temperamentally induced censoriousness are venial and relatively rare, usually hedged by qualifications, and almost wholly overshadowed by the rare and invaluable traits that he brings to his task.

The most conspicuous of those traits is simple industry, apparently endless and indefatigable. The sheer mass of work Stone shouldered in the fourteen years his book was aborning would surely have crushed many lesser men and is massive enough to have filled the entire scholarly careers of several reasonably energetic investigators. "Extents" laid on the property of debtors in

34. *Ibid.*, p. 618.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 629.
36. Stone provides the pertinent evidence justifying my summary, in *ibid.*, pp. 617-19, 627-32, and App. XXIX and XXX, p. 789.

the Chancery archives, registers of recognizances of debt "in the nature of Statute Staple" in those of the lord chamberlain, mortgages and sales records in the Close Rolls and Feet of Fines, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* – these are but a beginning.[37] Published Calendars of State Papers and private archives; manuscript records, public and private; correspondence, published and unpublished; architectural plans for lordly palaces and the palaces themselves; estate surveys and estate accounts of all sorts; memoirs and histories by contemporary figures of every magnitude; genealogies; lists of almost everything that the peers chose to list for a century and of a good many things they did not; the plays of the period and much of its ephemeral literature; contemporary and later treatises on law; almost everything that recent historians have written on the period that has a close bearing on his subject[38] – all these are grist for Stone's tireless and insatiable mill. Beyond his industry, and indispensable to its function, is something far more impressive than mere collocations of data by an energetic scholarly pack rat – his readiness to deal with hard questions in line of duty and his determination to pursue the answers at whatever cost to himself in time and labor. Some of the questions he wrestles with were initially raised by other scholars in the course of a long and intricate controversy in which he participated; others he framed for himself in the course of his own investigations; to all he has given laborious, patient, imaginative, and fruitful attention.[39] For example, although in a general and ill-defined way the problem of changes in the relation of the peers to the structure of political power had come up before, only Stone raised questions to which firm answers, some quantitative, some qualitative, were possible and then patiently ferreted out the answers himself. The result, the chapter on "Power," is the most exciting and most persuasive in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy.*

Perhaps it is characteristic of minds fruitful of hypothesis that they do not regard themselves forever bound to ideas, their own or those of others, to which they committed themselves in their youth. There is in truth no reason, besides an unhealthy aversion

37. In quest of the dispersion pattern of manorial values, Stone casually remarks that he scanned "some six miles" of Close Rolls, partly impelled thereto, I gather, by a remark of mine about the divergence in price between a property I once owned in Queens and the property on which the Empire State Building stands. J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (London, 1961), p. 128.

38. The exceptions (and they are important) are political-constitutional and religious history.

39. Later two important exceptions to this statement, of which Stone himself was aware, will be noted. They are religion and the peerage in its corporate capacity as the House of Lords.

to admitting that one ever made a mistake, why scholars should so entrap themselves. To unfreeze oneself from the posture of early (or late) infallibility is of all kinds of emancipation the most profitable for a historian. In this matter Stone is almost always a paragon. He usually displays a refreshing unwillingness to spend his life in lost battles in defense of youthful errors. No notion or hypothesis is sacrosanct; his own or anyone else's notion, rendered plausible by a respectable bit of supporting evidence, is treated as worth checking out. In all this there is nothing irresponsible. On the contrary, the irresponsible historian is the one who avoids the responsibilty of coherent statement and makes it his whole career to hoard great stocks of erudition for the sole purpose of having enough at hand for occasional and sporadic sniping. The courage to be found wrong is the precondition of getting anything important right. In a profession in which all too many scholars effortlessly achieve intellectual sclerosis before they are thirty, Stone retains a lively curiosity, an ebullient youthful spirit, an openness to chances for new insights that is enviable and that I envy. His industry, his energy, his imagination, his flexibility of mind constitute a combination of qualities that in historians are as excellent as they are rare. They are what make his study in depth of the way of life of the late Tudor–early Stuart aristocracy a historical feat the like of which may not be seen again for many years.

II

A book of such broad scope as *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, written over a period of fourteen years by a writer like Stone, who learned steadily as he worked his way along, is more than a monument of history writing; it is also a monument of the history of history writing. Examined closely, it reveals the changes in habit of thought and outlook characteristic of lively-minded historians concerned during the past quarter of a century with the period of English history it covers. It also reflects broad changes among historians who during those years wrote of other times and other places. Specifically, the book bears strata marks of the phases that historical thinking about the century preceding the outbreak of Civil War in 1642 has passed through in the last twenty-five years. Stone early identifies the underlying substratum of that thinking – the place where it all began. In the 1930s, he says, "most young historians were powerfully influenced by Marxist theory, and were in varying degrees supporters of some kind of

economic determinism in human affairs, an attitude of mind which was – and is – far from being confined to those of a politically leftward inclination."[40] In relation to the outbreak of 1640, that theory was vigorously though naively formulated in a little volume celebrating the three hundredth anniversary of the English Revolution.

> The period 1640-60 saw the destruction of a whole social order – feudalism – and the introduction of a political structure within which capitalism could freely develop. For tactical reasons, the ruling class in 1660 *pretended* that they were merely restoring the old form of the Constitution. But they intended by that restoration to give sanctity and social stamp to a new social order.
>
> The Civil War was a class war, in which the despotism of Charles I was defended by the reactionary forces of the established Church and feudal landlords. Parliament beat the King because it could appeal to the enthusiastic support of the trading and industrial classes in town and countryside, to the yeomen and progressive gentry.[41]

By the time Stone became engaged in long arduous study of the English aristocracy, R. H. Tawney had somewhat shifted the base of the argument. Quietly dispensing with the other groups whose effective force before 1640 was rather hard to document, he emphasized the economic rise of the gentry as "an insular species of the . . . genus" of change usually described in other lands as "the transition from a feudal to a bourgeois society."[42]

Stone's first emergence into the historical domain of which he is now indisputable master took the form of an attempt to clinch Tawney's argument by demonstrating the economic decline of the aristocracy contemporary with and in a sense concomitant to the conquest, first of wealth, then of power, by the gentry, viewed as the rural middle class. His early efforts to drive this point home by means of statistics came a cropper.[43] In *The Crisis of the Aris-*

40. Stone, *Crisis*, p. 6.

41. Christopher Hill (ed.), *The English Revolution, 1640* (London, 1940), pp. 80-81, 9.

42. R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry, 1558-1640," *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, XI (1941), 6.

43. The various views originating in or engendered by the statistics offered by Tawney and Stone will be found in *ibid.*, XI, 1-38; L. Stone, "The Anatomy of the Elizabethan Aristocracy," *ibid.*, XVIII (1948), 1-53; H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Elizabethan Aristocracy: an Anatomy Anatomised," *ibid.*, second series, III (1951), 279-98; L. Stone, "The Elizabethan Aristocracy: A Restatement," *ibid.*, second series, IV (1952), 302-21; H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry, 1540-1640, ibid.*, Supplement 1 (1953); R. H. Tawney, "The Rise of the Gentry: a Postscript," *ibid.*, second series, VII (1954), 91-97; J. P. Cooper, "The Counting of Manors," *ibid.*, second series, VIII (1956), 377-89; Hexter, *Reappraisals in History*, pp. 127-62.

tocracy, armed with fresh statistics, Stone returns to the hard-fought field of controversy over the fortunes of the aristocracy. In chapter iv, "Economic Change," he fires salvo after salvo of these statistics at his enemies of old. It is evident that in a work in which he spared himself no effort, the most Herculean labor was spent on mounting this new assault on an old battleground. The opposition, however, has not been silenced. With new recruits it has counterattacked the new statistics that Stone so energetically assembled.[44] To summarize the whole of Stone's evidence and argument and the counterarguments it has evoked would require an inordinate amount of space and be incredibly tedious. What is attempted here (doubtless very rashly) is to use Stone's data to make a few computations he did not make and from them to derive an argument or hypothesis. If the data on which that argument is based are even approximately accurate, the computations fully validate it.

Stone's position has two statistical foundations: 1) an attempt to estimate from a very extensive range of documents the gross rentals of all peers in 1559, 1602, and 1641; 2) an attempt to compute for several groupings of peerage families the attrition in ownership of manors between 1559 and 1602 and between 1602 and 1641. By Stone's own very candid admissions the first foundation is seriously defective, based on "*fragmentary information* from private sources about the financial positions in 1559 of only about a third of the total peerage,"[45] and evidence "rather greater" (how much greater?) for 1602. The attempt to eke out this information from tax returns which "it is self-evident . . . must be treated with extreme caution"[46] does not seem promising enough to provide a very solid base for a broad *general* argument, although it may cautiously be put to a number of specific uses.[47]

Then what of the counting of manors? The use of manorial counts first employed by Tawney as a basis for estimating the current financial condition of the owners of the manors counted has run up against serious objections. The first objection is that manors were not homogeneous units of value; what a manor was worth might vary enormously from manor to manor. The force of this objection diminishes, however, if one can show that for a con-

44. See *T.L.S.*, Apr. 17, 1966, pp. 286-88; Coleman, " 'Gentry' Controversy," *History*, LI, 165-74.
45. Stone, *Crisis*, p. 130. My italics.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
47. It will be put to such uses several times in what follows, where the use itself seems to keep the likely range error from markedly affecting the conclusion. The results of Stone's effort are summarized in *ibid.*, App. VIII, pp. 760-61.

siderable random sample of manors at given points in time, the values of a very high percentage of them cluster closely around their mean value. If the dispersion of values is not very extensive, the margin of error in any sizable sample in which no inherent bias of selection can be discovered will be correspondingly small. Using values of manors chosen at random from the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535 and from the Close Rolls between 1597 and 1608, Stone demonstrates that value dispersion around the mean price of manors at both these dates was not very large.[48] This makes manor counts a profitable index of gain and loss of income on one further condition – that the sample be large enough to balance out possible egregious eccentricity in the values of one or two manors in the sample. Thus statistical dispersion tables and computations of standard deviation can say nothing useful about a sample limited to a half dozen manors. This objection, however, can be overcome by use of large samples. Finally, even a large sample may maximize error at one or another end of the scale if the way in which the sample is chosen has a built-in bias. To avoid such errors, one must be extremely careful to avoid such a bias. Or one can attempt to counteract the bias by introducing a somewhat arbitrary but manifestly adequate correction.

Does Stone offer any statistics about manors almost wholly impervious to any of the objections just specified? One set seems especially impressive, although he himself makes relatively little use of it and consequently does not provide a key tabulation. The set is that of decennial purchases and sales of manors, and net losses of manors through purchase and sale from 1561 to 1641 by forty-two peerage families extant from 1559 to 1641, including only those transactions "of which the precise dates are known."

TABLE 1[49]

PURCHASES AND SALES OF MANORS

Date	*Purchases*	*Sales*	*Net Loss*
1561-70	33	100	67
1571-80	41	153	112
1581-90	41	138	97
1591-1600	17	180	163
1601-10	26	143	117
1611-20	22	60	38
1621-30	13	38	25
1631-40	15	31	16
Total	208	843	635

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-50.
49. *Ibid.*, App. XI, C, p. 766.

The set is impressive for several reasons. 1) The aggregate figures are very large, more than one thousand manors. 2) Up to 1611-20 the volume of transactions in each decennium is also considerable enough to reduce the danger of sampling error – between a minimum of 133 and a maximum of 197 exchanges per decade. 3) The sample of aristocrats is the most consistent and homogeneous possible, the one group that *as peers* underwent all the vicissitudes of the period under consideration. 4) It also is a reasonably large sample, about two thirds of the peerage both at Elizabeth's accession and at her death and still one third in 1641. The table is of major significance, granted three assumptions. The first assumption is simply that Stone has not egregiously miscounted the purchases and sales summarized in his table. There is no reason not to make and no option but to make this assumption. The second assumption is that any bias in the figures of dated purchases and sales should weigh on the side of the purchases rather than the sales. A study of Stone's statistics suggests an actual overweight of about 20 per cent on dated purchases as against dated sales.[50] The third assumption is that a marked and persistent overbalance of purchases by sales of major capital assets creates a presumption of over-all capital losses. Surely it does so in the absence of a showing that the capital realized by the net sales is being reinvested in such a way as to produce a profit equal to that lost by disinvestment. But, as Stone notes, from 1559 to 1641 and certainly to 1603 there was no major alternative to land as a long-term investment. At any rate no one has produced any evidence that the peerage profitably transferred assets from land to alternative forms of investment at the appropriate dates, and in the absence of such evidence the burden of providing it ought to fall on those who would account for the recorded disinvestment in land in that particular way. Since during the eighty-year period there were four sales for every purchase, the over-all ratio of disinvestment for the best sample of the peerage looks reasonably disastrous. But the over-all figure does not tell the whole story or at least tells it badly. It is far more noteworthy that net losses were disproportionately high in the two successive decades be-

50. This can be seen by comparing the figures in *ibid.*, App. XI, B, Col. IV, with those in App. XI, C. According to the former, thirty-three peerage families bought 141 manors between 1558 and 1602 and sold 756 manors, a ratio of only one recorded purchase for every 5.4 recorded sales. According to the latter table *at determinable dates* between 1561 and 1600, forty-two peerage families bought 133 manors and sold 571, a ratio of one dated purchase for 4.3 dated sales. Why sales should be less easy to date than purchases I do not know.

tween 1591 and 1610. In that quarter of the whole period, 44 per cent of the net losses took place, and this seems not only to indicate an economic crisis of the aristocracy but to pinpoint it.

Inconveniently missing here, however, is a tabulation Stone did not provide. Clearly what matters most in gauging the dimensions of the crisis is not the ratio of sales to purchases or of net losses at a particular time to over-all net losses, but *the relation at particular times of net losses to total manors then owned.* But for the forty-two families under consideration, Stone does not indicate the total manors owned because for nine families the data are inadequate. For thirty-three of these families, however, he says that the data for 1559 do permit a reasonably accurate estimate of total manors then held; he puts that total at 1,670. This would make possible the computations needed, if for those thirty-three families (still a pretty satisfactory sample) there were a decennial purchase and sale table like that given above for forty-two families. It is this key set of numbers that Stone omits. To carry the analysis further, therefore, an arbitrary figure so large that it will exceed the probable one for the holdings in 1559 of the nine peers omitted from the estimate of total manors must be added to the 1,670 manors and the sum used as a basis of computation. As a guide for making such an allowance, there are only Stone's rough estimates of relative rental income of the peerage broken down into income categories running from I at the top to VIII at the bottom. In 1602 the average place of a peer on the I-to-VIII scale was 6.3. The nine peers omitted were presumably somewhat better off since their average place was 5.9. Let it then be first assumed that the nine peers held manors, at least in numbers proportional to those held by the thirty-three for whom Stone provided the over-all figure of 1,670. That would give them 456 manors to start with. But since they were a bit richer than average, adding half that number again, 228, to their total, gives a very generous estimate of 684 manors for their holding in 1561.[51] Adding this figure to Stone's count of 1,670 manors for the other thirty-three families results in an estimate of 2,354 manors in 1561 for the forty-two families to whom the disinvestment table applies.[52] On

51. Generous since it assigns them an average of 50 per cent more manors apiece than Stone ascribes to the other thirty-three peers.

52. A further objection may be raised to the procedure here adopted. It is that to treat 2,354 manors as of 1558 as a base from which to make a series of deductions for net loss in each decade does not take account of gains and losses of manors from other sources than purchase and sale between 1558 and 1602 and thus distorts the rate of loss. It can be shown, however, that over the time span gains and losses from other sources did not markedly affect the relation between

this basis a decennial rate of disinvestment can be computed and also a rate for three unequal periods, 1561-90, 1591-1610, 1611-41 (Table 2 and Graphs 1 and 2).

TABLE 2

RATE OF DIVESTMENT OF MANORS

	Date	*Manors*	*Net Loss*	*Loss Rate (%)*
(a)	1561-70	2354	67	2.85
	1571-80	2287	112	4.90
	1581-90	2175	97	4.46
	1591-1600	2078	163	7.84
	1601-10	1915	117	6.11
	1611-20	1798	38	2.11
	1621-30	1760	25	1.42
	1631-40	1735	16	0.92
(b)	1561-90	2354	276	11.72
	1591-1610	2078	280	13.47
	1611-40	1798	79	4.39

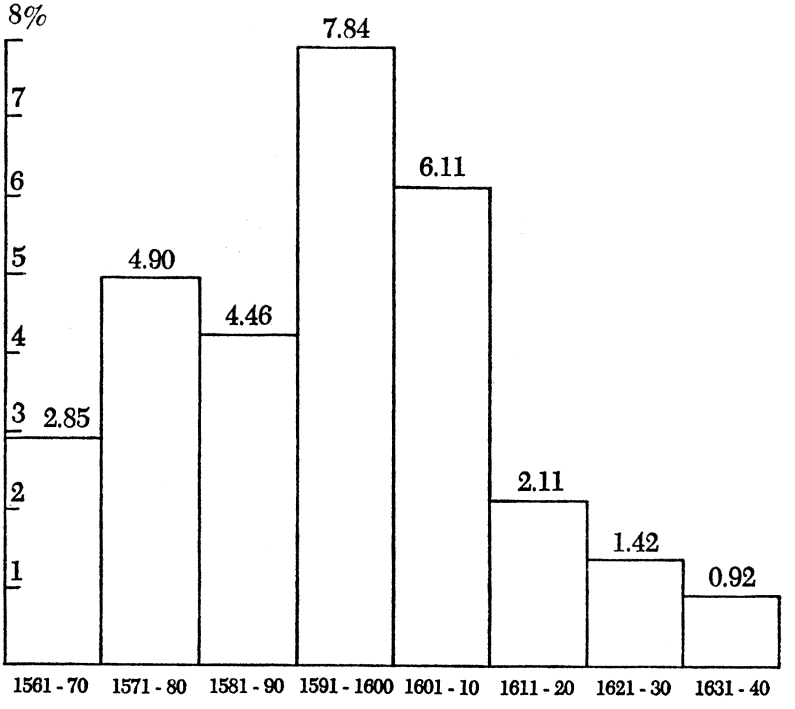
The computation indicates a fairly high rate of disinvestment in manors in the first three decades of Elizabeth's reign which then climbs catastrophically in the following two. A cluster of families that squanders 12 per cent of its main assets in thirty years and then sheds 13 per cent of what is left in the next twenty is not doing very well for itself. The indication here is the same as it was in the earlier and cruder calculation. Some of these forty-two families came to the verge of catastrophe in the decade or so around 1602. But another fact also seems to emerge from these

probable net losses and probable manorial holdings. Between 1558 and 1602, according to Stone, thirty-three families by means other than purchase and sale acquired four hundred manors and lost 186, a balance of 214 acquired. *Ibid.*, App. XI, B, Col. IV. Correcting this by a factor of 1.4, that is $\frac{2354}{1670}$, to allow for the estimated increase in manors ascribable to the addition of nine families gives an estimated net gain of three hundred manors for forty-two families between 1558 and 1602 by means other than purchase and sale. Against this, however, must be set what has been noted about the relation of *dated* purchases and sales to *actual* purchases and sales. A correction of 140 per cent in the combined net recorded losses of 615 (756-141) manors for thirty-three families between 1558 and 1602 takes into account the addition of nine families. From the result, 861 manors, is subtracted the net dated losses for forty-two families during the same period, 438 manors. (See Table 1.) This gives a net undated loss of 423 manors due to the excess of sales over purchases. By more than one hundred manors this counterbalances estimated net gains by means other than purchase and sale. The preceding computation of rates therefore has introduced no significant probable increase of error, and indeed it is likely that these computations minimize rather than maximize rates of disinvestment in manors by the forty-two peerage families between 1561 and 1602. Stone's own figures for the dated purchases and sales of the thirty-three families with 1,670 manors in 1558, were they available, would make unnecessary some of the above conjectural corrections.

Graph 1

RATE OF DIVESTMENT OF MANORS

(1561-1640 by decade)



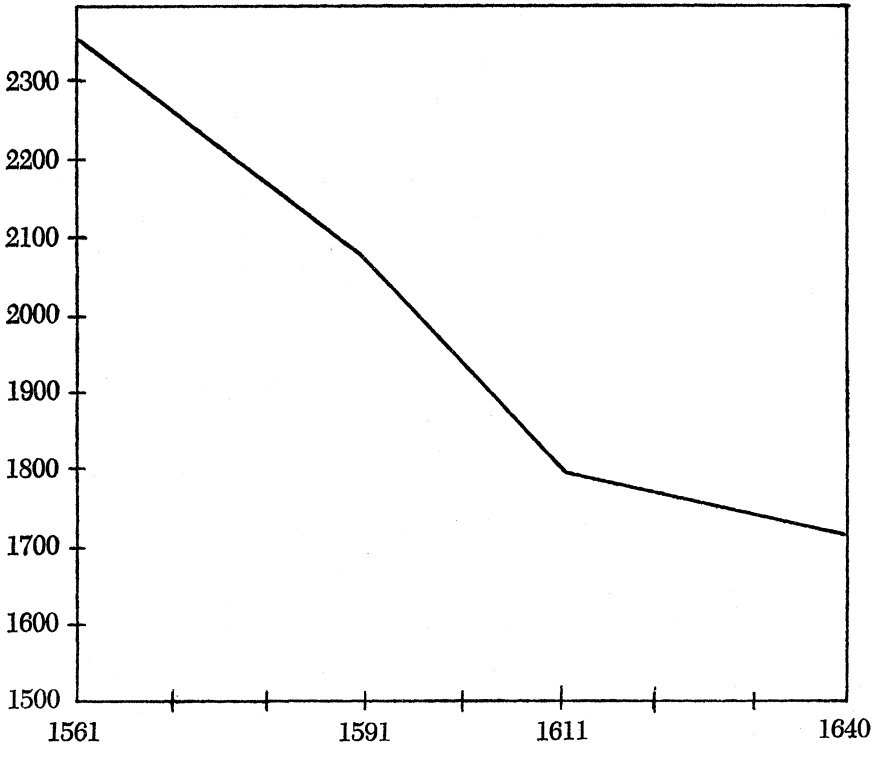
figures: not many went over the brink. For many of these aristocrats the economic crisis ended more abruptly than it started. By 1610, after a last spell of property liquidations, it was over; and if manorial counts mean anything, they mean that seven years after James I's accession to the throne, the only group of aristocrats whose family fortunes are traceable from 1558 to 1641 were in a sheltered financial harbor where they remained for the next thirty years. For them the rate of disinvestment is certainly trivial in the three decades before 1640, and the disinvestment itself may possibly be illusory. What manor counts alone actually appear to reveal is "the crisis of the aristocracy, 1591-1610."

Or do they? Will not that depend on what one means by "the crisis" and by "the aristocracy"? Since Stone's statistics on manors do yield what looks like solid evidence as to both the timing and the amplitude of the financial ups and downs of forty-two peerage families, what does this finding signify in the broader context of the history of the period, a history on so many aspects of which Stone's other findings throw new or brighter light? And first what *was* the crisis that Stone's manor count reveals and that the small statistical exercise above may have brought into slightly sharper focus? In the very narrowest sense it was a crisis in the family fortunes of several families among a sample of forty-two families

Graph 2

RATE OF DIVESTMENT OF MANORS

(*Loss rate per period in number of manors divested*)



that already held peerages in 1559 and still held them in 1641, a crisis that may have extended to some families that acquired titles between 1558 and 1603 and to some that became extinct before 1603.[53] A very considerable number of families entered the Elizabethan age bloated with monastic spoils, gathered quickly at bargain rates, which as courtiers and peers they were in a favored position to gobble up. A decade or so of considerable disgorging was therefore perhaps in the cards and indeed took place. There was, however, a decline in the rate of disinvestment in the 1580s. What requires scrutiny is the resumption and the appalling rapidity of the dispersion of landed assets by this cluster of peerage families from 1590 to 1610. The new wave of disinvestment seems to have followed the conjuncture of a number of loosely related or unrelated circumstances reaching special intensity at just this time. It is a rather long list:

1. Habits of extravagance acquired earlier in very rich families continued to consume capital assets even when such consumption reached the peril point.[54]

2. The success of the long Tudor campaign against aristocratic and other forms of civil violence reduced the incentive to land hoarding which existed when landlordship was a condition of manlordship, and when manlordship might be a life or death matter.[55]

3. The temptation to sell grew stronger with the rising value of land; and in the absence of strict settlements to protect heirs from the spendthrift fathers, and especially from the spendthrift brothers, uncles, or cousins from whom they inherited, who did not particularly like and sometimes particularly disliked their successors, selling was easy.[56]

4. The primitive condition of the money market raised the price of credit so high that in the short run the sale of land looked a less costly way of laying hands on cash quickly than the alternative of loans at 10 per cent interest or high-cost mortgages without equity of redemption. (Retrospectively it seems clear that over the half century between 1590 and 1640, capital gains on landholdings warranted a considerable outlay on interest charges as an alternative to sale of land. At the time, however, noble sellers did not have the advantage of hindsight, or the evidence

53. There were only ten such families of which eight survived beyond 1603.
54. Stone, *Crisis*, ch. x.
55. *Ibid.*, ch. v.
56. *Ibid.*, ch. vi.

about population increase that was a precondition for prediction, or the technique of economic analysis that, given the evidence, might have made a prediction of the price movement of land possible.)[57]

5. The costs of war in Spain and Ireland tightened the royal purse strings, never excessively loose in Elizabeth's reign, reducing the flow of royal bounty to a trickle at a time when the Queen's need and demand for costly public service from the peerage were rising rather than declining.

6. A clutch of *jeunesse dorée*, weary of the restraints put on them by Lord Burleigh, spent like sailors as a prologue to the Essex conspiracy, a disastrous resort to violence, aimed at restoring their momentarily shattered fortunes.[58]

The most impressive evidence of the combined ravages of these various circumstances is in Stone's list of heavy debtors in about 1601.[59] It is remarkable on several grounds. In the first place, it does not include the names of several peerage families that on the basis of other evidence appear to have suffered a most severe loss of income from land – the Veres, Earls of Oxford, the Stanleys, Earls of Derby, the Herberts, Earls of Pembroke, and the Lords Berkeley.[60] Moreover, the seventeen peers listed seem to have been considerably better off on the average than the whole peerage as of 1602, and to have included a much smaller proportion of very poor peers than the rest of the peerage did.[61] Yet in ten years this group – less than 30 per cent of the peers – had sold off land worth more than the 125 per cent of the estimated annual gross rental of the entire peerage in 1602, and even after sales they still owed in private debts a good bit more than that rental.[62] To doubt that there was some sort of crisis for these people in 1602 and to refuse to recognize that for families in such straits things might have had to get a bit worse before they got any better seem to require an excess of skepticism. And yet seen in this way, the crisis was as narrow as it was short-lived. In the first place, evidence is lacking as to whether or not it sharply touched the

57. *Ibid.*, ch. ix.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 481-87.
59. *Ibid.*, App. XXI, p. 778.
60. *Ibid.*, App. VIII, p. 760.
61. On Stone's I-to-VIII scale their average gross rental stood at 6 in 1602 as against 6.3 for all peers. Only 30 per cent of them were in the VII-VIII range as against nearly 60 per cent for the rest of the peerage. *Ibid.*, App. VIII, B, p. 760.
62. Sales, £173,000+, debts, £150,000+, for seventeen peers. *Ibid.*, App. XXI, p. 778. Rental, £140,000, for the entire lay peerage (fifty-eight persons). *Ibid.*, App. VIII, B, p. 760.

five hundred rich gentry families whom on his broadest definition Stone includes in the aristocracy. Moreover, as previously noted, for the solid sample of forty-two peerage families dating from before 1558, for whom Stone offers dated purchase and sale figures, the crisis, measured by disinvestment, grinds to something like a complete halt around 1610. Evidence that the slide stopped is clear by 1641, when in terms of estimated gross rentals some 40 per cent of these families had improved their economic position in degrees varying from moderate to spectacular.[63] Under the circumstances one wonders whether the *economic* "crisis of the aristocracy" did much more than permanently devastate the fortunes of a very few families and throw enough of a scare into the rest to cause them to change their ways, put their affairs in order, and thus unawares prepare themselves to enjoy and improve on the opportunities that a happier (for them) conjuncture of circumstances provided from about 1605 on.

Statistics — even very good statistics — can deceive insufficiently wary historians. If they are indeed good, they provide accurate and precise information with respect to the processes or situations to which they are relevant. Both "statisticism" and some kinds of historicism, however, can be a little misleading when applied to people who experience life neither statistically nor historically. The implications are serious, since during much of the past (and some of the present) in many matters many men did not experience life statistically or historically, but through the misty veil in which tradition and custom appear mingled with myth. This is not to argue that quantities and the past did not matter to such people. It does mean that they may have mattered in ways different from the ones that people very conscious of quantity, statistics, and what actually happened are likely to assume. So even after one has quantified as precisely as possible and considered antecedent circumstances as fully as possible, a question remains. This question is not "Did all this matter to the people under consideration?" but "*How* did it matter?" What precise computations do not always provide is a notion of the response of contemporaries to the situations they reveal. Indeed they do not provide any assurance that contemporaries were aware of the situations, or if some contemporaries were aware, which ones, and what the nature and quality of such awareness was.

The economic anguish of a considerable number of peers

63. *Ibid.*, App. VIII, C, p. 761.

around 1602 is a case in point. All peers who had to liquidate a big slice of their capital assets must have been aware of what they were doing and why they were doing it. And since beyond and above their intermingling at court, in council, and in the country, they were all members of a small select club, the House of Lords, that met frequently from 1590 to 1610, it is likely that all the peers had a pretty good notion of who were in straits and how badly. Their individual responses to their troubles varied – from those of the unreformed wastrels who tried the desperate remedy of rebellion in the Essex conspiracy to that of the remarkable reformed one, the Earl of Northumberland, who improved years of imprisonment by an almost excessive indulgence in estate management so successful that in 1641 his heir was one of the five richest peers in England. Insofar as Stone's estimates of gross rentals provide a basis for judgment, a few families by bad management or bad luck continued to slip after 1602.[64] Almost all of the rest at least held their own and about two fifths improved their landed income, a few spectacularly.[65] Less extravagance, better luck, better management, better times, better credit facilities, and better pickings at court all contributed to the happy ending of the economic troubles of the group of peers whose fortunes have here been followed. These factors also contributed to the downfall of the view of the crisis of the aristocracy that started Stone on the pilgrim's progress which ended in his great book, the view that, as Tawney succinctly put it, in the 1640s "it was discovered . . . that as a method of foreclosure war was cheaper than litigation."[66] Foreclosure by litigation was in fact not an option. There was almost no one to sell up. If any segment of the peerage was "feudal" in 1641, it was the one composed of families who had held their titles from before the accession of Elizabeth. Yet on the whole that group was very solvent indeed in the 1640s on the eve of its political liquidation, far better off than it had been four decades earlier.[67]

How, then, did others see the plight of the peers around 1602? There is not much direct evidence on which to base a positive answer to this question. One may, however, hazard a guess that

64. Bourchier, Hastings, Ratcliffe, Stourton, Talbot.
65. Percy, Vere, Manners, Seymour, Somerset, Wharton.
66. Tawney, "Rise of the Gentry," *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, XI, 12.
67. On Stone's scale of rental income it climbed from an average place of 6.3 in 1602, the lowest point reached during the whole period by any grouping of peers chronologically delimited, to 5.7 in 1641. *Ibid.*, App. VIII, B and C, pp. 760-61.

those, not personally involved, who saw anything like a crisis saw it as the acute embarrassment of a cluster of great families temporarily in spectacular financial difficulty. What the rest saw, if they took notice, was a local lord or two who had sold some of his land but was still able to live like a lord off what he had left.[68] On the basis of indirect evidence it is at least possible to surmise what the peers and their contemporaries did not see. Neither saw a crisis of the aristocracy in the sense of a loss of respect for and acceptance of the existing hierarchically structured society based on inherited wealth and privilege, or in the sense of the loss of prestige of the peerage itself at the apex of the social pyramid. The mass of qualitative evidence for such a twofold crisis is almost all of later date and either does not relate at all to the economic difficulties of the peers or does not relate to the economic situation of the peerage families of 1602, since it comes at a time when those families had got their economic bearings again. The indirect evidence of the social solvency of the peerage in 1602 as against the economic straits of particular peers is provided by the early Jacobean creations. During the first decade of his reign James created twenty-four new peerages.[69] The survivors or heirs of those creations in 1641 are by far the richest single chronological grouping of peers in the House of Lords at the time.[70] With a very few exceptions for mere royal favor, by the standards of the time the men ennobled by James up to 1613 had earned their honors by great wealth, or long and important service to crown and commonwealth, or both. Many of them would have been peers earlier had it not been for Elizabeth's curious aversion to promoting even the most deserving to the peerage. At the level of the House of Lords there was no inflation of honors in the first ten years of James I.

The conclusion is a paradox. Between 1558 and 1641 the peers were probably never worse off financially than in 1602, and the prestige of peerage was probably never higher. In 1641, after three decades of steady financial recovery by the same peerage families of 1602, the prestige of the titled nobility was at a new low and

68. Again on Stone's range I-to-VIII table of gross rental income for a gross view, despite the crisis that resulted in a heavy disinvestment of manors, the median shift downward by 1602 was zero; that is, more peers had either gained or not lost in real income than had lost. Only four families had slipped more than one place in the table, the Veres, the Stanleys, the Herberts, and the Berkeleys. *Ibid.*

69. The creations considered here are those from the accession of James I to the creation of Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset. *Ibid.*, App. V, p. 757. For some reason demographic attrition in this group was very high, about 45 per cent in 28-38 years. See 1641 list in *ibid.*, App. VIII, C, p. 761.

70. In Stone's range table they average 4.6 in 1641. No other considerable group stands so high. *Ibid.*

authority of the House of Lords was heading toward rock bottom. The conclusion seems inescapable. *The economic and the socio-political crises of the aristocracy were not conterminous and congruent in time; they were on the contrary countercyclical and traversed each other.*[71]

III

The third question that Stone seeks to cope with is how it came about that in the early seventeenth century the leadership of concerted opposition to the actions of the ruler, exercised by English peers and magnates in the Middle Ages, fell to men about one step down on the social pyramid – the parliamentary gentry and lawyers. It reveals another historiographic stratum of *The Crisis of the Aristocracy.* One can only guess when Stone's view of his task began to change. Perhaps between 1953 and 1958, for it was then that other scholars proposed views on the genesis of the English Revolution, divergent from and irreconcilable with the ones that had started him on his long journey through the aristocracy. However that may be, one suspects his debt to others was limited and that he mainly propelled himself into a change of opinion as his research turned up more and more data. Most likely his energy, his integrity to his evidence, and his impatience wearied him of whittling his findings down to fit the exiguous dimensions of his initial hypothesis, "that the difficulties of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century aristocracy were at bottom financial." He ceased to believe that a financial crisis "was the sole, or even necessarily the prime, cause of their troubles."[72] Having arrived at this crucial point, he never looked back until he reached the conclusion of the concluding chapter in his big book: the crisis of the aristocracy was a crisis of prestige, the causes of which were

> manifold . . . They include the decline in the wealth of the peers relative to that of the gentry; the shrinkage of their territorial possessions, in both absolute and relative terms; the decay of their military power in men, arms, castles, and will to resist; the granting of titles of honour for cash not

71. Stone's argument for a continuity between the financial crisis and the crisis of prestige of the peerage is not highly persuasive. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-64. The evidence he offers to connect the two is exiguous and unconvincing compared with what he provides to connect that second crisis with circumstances on which he does not focus so effectively. See below, pp. 58-70. That the adaptive moves of individual peers to meet their temporary financial embarrassment around 1602 significantly affected the prestige and power of the whole order at the time or three decades later is not impossible, but Stone's evidence that they did so is thin.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

> merit, in too great numbers, and to too unworthy persons; the change in their attitude towards the tenantry from suppliers of manpower to suppliers of rent; the undermining of their electoral influence due to the rise of deeply felt political and religious issues; the increasing preference for extravagant living in the city instead of hospitable living in the countryside; the spread throughout the propertied classes of a bookish education, acquired at school and university, and the demand by the State for an administrative *élite* of proved competence, irrespective of the claims of rank; the pervasive influence of the rise of individualism, the Calvinist belief in a spiritual hierarchy of the Elect, and the Puritan exaltation of the private conscience, which affected attitudes toward hierarchy and obedience in secular society; and finally the growing psychological breach between Court and Country in attitudes, real or supposed, towards constitutional theory, methods and scale of taxation, forms of worship, aesthetic tastes, financial probity, and sexual morality.[73]

Even beyond this he came to recognize that

> Particular crises arising from particular events, personalities, and policies, the ineptitude of James, the corruption of Buckingham, the obstinacy of Strafford, Laud, and Charles; the rise of puritanism, the growth of a sense of constitutionalism, the development of improved procedural techniques by the House of Commons. . . . together . . . still provide the best guide to the issues which divided men one from another when civil war broke out in 1642.[74]

The movement of historical thought during a quarter of a century in the direction of sophistication and maturity implied in these long sentences may best be gauged by repeating here the sweet simplicities of 1940. In "the English Revolution of 1640-1660 . . . an old order that was essentially feudal was destroyed by violence, a new capitalist social order created in its place."[75] As both a symptom and an exemplar of this movement, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* is indeed a "landmark in the historical landscape," a monument to what can be achieved by historians when they break the bonds of a sterile and stifling orthodoxy and accept both the

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73. *Ibid.*, pp. 748-49.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
75. Hill, *English Revolution*, p. 9. This is not to argue that it is *impossible* to reduce Stone's complexities to the early simplicities. It is to suggest that those who wish to reduce the "explanation" of the English Revolution *in this or any other way* to a simplicist pattern address themselves to those complexities and not merely prescind from them on the grounds that they are unimportant. The practice of deciding in advance on meta-historical grounds and without consideration of the record of the past what is important and what is not is itself now hopelessly passé and (hopefully) past.

intellectual delights and the intellectual risks that such an emancipation offers to and imposes upon them.

Sharply to change directions in mid-flight to a book is a hard maneuver; the path of one's earlier trajectory almost inevitably leaves traces on one's final course; evidence gathered with one view of the past in mind does not readily accommodate itself to an altered view; and a reasonable economy with the expenditure of one's own life does not warrant a return trip through the record. In his pursuit of an understanding of the subordinate role of the peerage in the events that precipitated the upheaval of the 1640s, Stone made such a shift in mid-flight. This happened when he decided that the financial difficulties of the peers were secondary to a crisis of prestige and confidence in dragging them down. Under the circumstances it is hardly remarkable that he did not completely succeed in reorienting his work; it is remarkable that he succeeded so well. Insofar as he was able to deal with that crisis under the rubrics of power, education, and the inflation of honors, he could hardly have done better. A few of the traits of the age of crisis Stone came to understand well but in some degree too late. His earlier momentum deflected him from adequately conveying their importance, an importance which his shift in direction had enabled him adequately to grasp. His way of organizing his book (and his thoughts) diffuses attention from those traits rather than directing it to them. The problem is one of focus not, except in one particular, of omission. The three traits of the age that escape rather than capture the attention they deserve are the court-country tension and the impact of Puritanism, with which Stone deals diffusely, and the position of the lay peers as the preponderant element in the House of Lords, with which he does not deal at all.[76] What follows is an attempt, mainly in the light of evidence that Stone himself provides, to force these matters into the center of attention, rather than to permit them to flicker on the periphery.

Almost casually Stone himself makes the main point: *"The peerage in 1615 still retained its full dignity and respect."*[77] If this is so, then with respect to the crisis in the prestige of the aristocracy and of confidence in it, the hinge date is after 1615.[78] But as

76. The following observations are based on a fairly extensive, if desultory, reading in sources and secondary works on the period. In almost every detail the observations themselves require direct confirmation from a systematic study of the sources.

77. Stone, *Crisis*, p. 103. My italics.

78. Most of the data for the following paragraphs are drawn from *ibid.*, ch. iii, "The Inflation of Honours"; App. III, p. 755; App. VIII, C, p. 761; App.

a result of his youthful prepossessions Stone must have oriented much of his statistical investigation to the financial crisis of the peers around 1602. Despite his own later reorientation he retains that statistical bench mark in some tabulations where the issue is not financial condition but prestige, and also where the interplay of finance and prestige renders advisable the intrusion of an additional tabulation from about 1618 to 1628. Although Stone's statistics never systematically single out that decade, the figures for the inflation of honors clearly mark it for special attention. James's creation of almost a thousand knights at his accession was rather hasty, but it would not have been catastrophic had replacement been held to the annual rate of about fifty, to which it fell between 1606 and 1615, while the King's early errors slowly went down the drain of mortality. The doubling of the rate of creations from 1616 to 1625, coupled with the introjection of the baronetage, obliterated the chance for healthy attrition. And in the succeeding decade the new honor of baronet, kept well in bounds to 1618, went the way of the old one of knight, when almost two hundred new creations swamped the initial group of about one hundred. As for the peerage itself, between the promotion of Buckingham in 1618 and 1628, the number of peers almost doubled. For the mathematics of prestige and confidence, it is this cohort about which statistics would be especially welcome. In only a few of Stone's tabulations, however, can it be isolated from the whole set of creations between 1603 and 1641. With respect to marriage the group can be sorted out. It then appears that in contrast to the almost complete absence of such alliances among more ancient peerage families, by 1630 this later lot had fourteen marriages of mercantile heiresses to their credit (or discredit) either before or after their creation.

The failure to draw a line around about 1618 causes most diffi-

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XXIX and XXX, p. 789. Only *creations* from Buckingham's own accession to the peerage to the end of 1628 are counted as "Buckingham peers." The choice may be faulted on several points: 1) Buckingham's accession to favor antedates by two or three years his promotion to the peerage, leaving some peers in no man's land between Somerset's fall and Buckingham's creation. Actually, however, there are only four such peers. *Ibid.*, App. V, p. 757. 2) It does not include *promotions within* the peerage during the Buckingham era. It may be argued, however, that while these promotions may have resulted in the embitterment of relations within the peerage, as far as impact on the country gentry is concerned, the major harm was done only by promotion to the peerage, since it was that promotion which exalted the status and precedence of those who received it over baronets and/or knights. 3) The list is extended beyond Buckingham's death to the end of 1628 on the grounds the Duke's influence here reached from beyond the grave, and that the braking process on creations does not become evident until 1629 at the earliest. *Ibid.*

culty in dealing with the economic viability of the peers, for here it is most clear that the creations of the first decade of James's reign should be treated in the main as long overdue grants of honor to Elizabethan families of means and mark – Cecil, Sydney, Egerton, Petre, Spencer, Cavendish, Stanhope, Arundell. Statistically this appropriate transfer of the dividing line would sharply increase the average and aggregate manorial holdings that Stone assigns to the "old peers" and sharply set off the narrow territorial base of the creations of the Buckingham ascendancy.[79] A comparison of their respective rental incomes in 1641 indicates the difference in landholding between the two groups of peers.[80] In 1641 the average income of peers whose families entered the peerage before 1613 was 5.1 on Stone's I-to-VIII scale. The average of those who entered in 1618-28 was 6.2. This would mean an average gross rental of about £4000 for the peers of the Buckingham era as against £6400 for peers whose families entered the peerage before 1613; or in relative terms, on the average the Buckingham peers had just about five eighths of the income enjoyed by those of earlier vintage. By 1641 the peers created during the Duke's ascendancy had had between a quarter of a century and about half that time to augment their landholdings. Given the tendency of the aristocracy to transform other assets into acres, the shortness of so many Buckingham peers in landed wealth in 1641 suggests that they comprised a more than ordinary number of lean cattle.

The value of the above statistical exercise in terms of a prestige analysis depends in the first place on the contemporary social visibility of the groups examined. In this context the utility of Stone's statistics based on the grouping of peerage families as ante- or post-1602 is doubtful, because it is doubtful whether many contemporaries saw them in that chronological framework. By way of contrast the Buckingham peers began to attain an unenviable

79. The figures as Stone gives them already mark a sharp distinction between the landed position of the "old" and "new" peerage in 1641, the former with an average of thirty-four manors apiece, the latter with twenty apiece, the former with proportionally twice as many families as the latter holding forty or more manors. *Ibid.*, App. XI, p. 764. With the creations of 1603-13 added to their number, the first group would almost certainly appear with double the average manorial holding of the peers created during the Buckingham ascendancy and with four times as many holders of forty or more manors among an approximately equal number of peers.

80. Stone's data for 1641 are based mainly on royalist compounding papers. This should minimize *relative* error among considerable samples of peers. One cannot discount the likelihood that men took a chance on understating the value of land for the release of which they had to pay a mulct proportional to its worth, but there is no reason to suppose that there was a marked differential in mendacity quotient as between the peers created up to 1613 and those created from 1618 through 1628.

visibility shortly after Villiers succeeded to full favor. That visibility increased throughout the favorite's life and may not have been wholly dimmed in the period of Charles I's personal rule. This is what gives point to the above calculation. Average income, however, is not a trait socially visible to contemporaries, and for prestige analysis the visibility of the trait quantified is important. For such analysis both the number and proportion of peers meagerly endowed with land is of special interest; in a conspicuously landed aristocracy such a meager endowment confers a negative distinction. In the group of peerage families surviving to 1641, there were more land-short peers among the creations of the ten-year Buckingham period than among all the families whose peerages antedated 1613, eighteen as against fourteen. Moreover, the land-short peers made up less than a quarter of the pre-1613 group as against more than two fifths of the Buckingham peers. Finally, there is the question of the "fit" of the especially visible subgroups of poor Buckingham peers and poor pre-1613 peers into the structure of the community. With respect to the pre-1613 peers this could hardly have been much of a problem; all but one of the families in the group had been poor before 1602, all but five before 1558. By the second quarter of the seventeenth century, their straitened circumstances should have become assimilated bits of the local social landscape, rather like venerable ivy-clad ruins. It was otherwise with the Buckingham peers, and if they lived in the country, they were trebly conspicuous: their promotions were new; the circumstances of their promotions were often questionable or simply scandalous; and in terms of talent, service, and wealth their claims to local precedence over the upper country gentry were exiguous or nonexistent. Yet their new titles automatically conferred such precedence on them. To that same upper gentry, which five times in the 1620s and twice again in 1640 gathered for meetings of Parliament, some of the poor Buckingham peers were unduly visible in the country; some of the poor and some of the rich ones, who did not make themselves visible locally, were only too visible in London, where they swarmed after or peddled the favors of a discredited court.

The mention of favor and court leads to one last statistical point. If Stone's figures are even approximately correct, the channels of large-scale favor open to English peers, scandalously broad after the accession of James, became even more scandalously narrow twelve years later and remained so for about another twelve. During that relatively short time the Duke of Buckingham may

have been the beneficiary of offices and rewards equal to those enjoyed by the entire Elizabethan peerage throughout the whole of the Queen's forty-five-year reign.[81] In James's last days the young lover of the doting, doddering homosexual King took all, and he continued to take all for four years more as favorite of James's son and successor. Whoever else received more than scraps of reward at court enjoyed them at the hands and the behest of the Duke of Buckingham. For the English peerage this produced a dilemma not resolvable and a disaster not retrievable at the time or in the years that followed Buckingham's assassination. It transformed the diffuse difficulties of the peers into an insoluble crisis of prestige and confidence in the aristocracy. What gave form to the crisis that precipitated itself around Buckingham was a complex interplay among Puritanism, the tension between court and country, and the political position of the House of Lords. By the time he finished his great study, Lawrence Stone knew this, but like the fox he knew many things. Like hedgehogs, observant contemporary Englishmen knew scarcely more than this one big thing and often did not precisely formulate what they knew, but nevertheless they knew it very well.

Better to understand what happened and its impact on the aristocracy, one needs to examine a process of change within the social matrix of the early modern English ruling class. A no doubt oversimplified analysis may help bring into sharp focus relations between court and country, peerage and gentry, on which Stone's study casts abundant light, but light that in consequence of his chosen structure of presentation is intermittent and diffused. The components of the matrix are court peers, country peers, country gentry, court gentry, thus:

	PEERS	GENTRY
COURT	court peers	court gentry
COUNTRY	country peers	country gentry

[82]

81. *Ibid.*, App. XIX, C, p. 775.

82. The model suggested derives from the one which Robert Walcott found necessary in order to make some sense of English politics from the 1670s to the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty. Robert Walcott, *English Politics in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 155-58.

In terms of *legal status* throughout the period, the line of division between peers and gentry is at each moment distinct. From the moment he enters the peerage, a man is legally distinguishable from a gentleman of whatever lower degree. So sharp a division does not necessarily separate court and country as *spheres of activity and influence.* Some peers and some of the gentry can be active both at court and in the country and have influence in both places. This social matrix may be thought of not only as a matrix of honors and a matrix of activity and influence but also as a *communications network* through which circulate and are exchanged the views and outlook of each group. In the country gentry section, however, this communications network has one peculiarity that requires special attention. That sector differs from the others in its internal structure. It is composed of the hierarchies of *local* eminence in the separate counties of England and Wales. The politically effective country gentry are those who stand high in at least one country hierarchy.[83] It is only this group – by Stone's estimate some five hundred men at any given time between 1558 and 1641 – that is here relevant. With respect to this group of country gentry, questions arise not only about their communication with the other three components of the social matrix but with respect to intercommunication among the hierarchies across county boundaries.

Given this general structure, what follows is an attempt somewhat schematically to describe the functioning of the system that it defines at two points in time forty years apart – the late 1580s, when Elizabeth stood at the peak of her popularity, and the late 1620s. In the 1580s the line of honor between the upper gentry and the peerage had rarely been crossed in the thirty years since the Queen's accession. In that whole time by creation, restoration, and resumption there had been only fifteen accessions to the peerage in all, on the average of one every two years, and there had been but one accession in the past fifteen years. At the center among the court group there was little correlation between peerage on the one hand and power and prestige on the other. For years advancement in power and office had not brought a title to any of the court gentry, nor did possession of a title warrant expectation of official advancement. Within the framework of a deferential system, possession of peerage honors created no pre-

83. I know of no effort to discover whether and in what number members of the upper country gentry stood high in more than one such hierarchy; I have only a vague and unverified impression that such men were few, and that even those who had estates in more than one county concentrated their struggle for influence and pre-eminence in one county only.

sumption at all as to influence on policy. The Catholicism or incompetence or relative poverty that discouraged a considerable number of peers from seeking place at a court which often demanded inputs of expenditure in excess of its outputs of rewards consigned them to "the idiocy of rural life." On the other hand, for the upper gentry places at court commensurate in power and prestige with their local authority, dignity, and "worship" were too few to attract more than a small cluster. Seen from the other direction, however, the proportion of court peers and court gentry who actively participated in the affairs of the local county hierarchies seems to have been considerable. The high place in that hierarchy legally due to the court peers by virtue of their mere titles was also practically theirs by virtue of a continuing interest in county affairs, an interest re-enforced by the appointment of some of them to the recently instituted county office of lord lieutenant. And the restrictive policy that had closed promotion to peerage to the court gentry ensured that the more eminent among them would command wealth and prestige sufficient to entitle them to a high and unchallenged position in one county hierarchy or another.

This pattern determined the directions of flow of communication. At court it flowed freely between and within gentry and peerage. And because of the local activity of court gentry and court peers alike, there was a considerable flow of effective communication between the local gentry hierarchies and the court. On the other hand, the intercommunication between the local hierarchies seems to have been relatively slight. The one institutionalized structure encouraging such communication was Parliament, where members of those hierarchies gathered in a general assembly. But meetings of Parliament under Elizabeth were both rare and brief, rarer and briefer than in the reigns of her sister, of her brother, or, after 1529, of her father. And for whatever reason, the upper country gentry does not seem to have developed a highly effective and extra-legal network of communication among the county hierarchies.[84] The central switchboard, so to speak, of the lines linking the county hierarchies was at court. Because the court gentry and the court peers maintained ready and continuous communication between court and country, they retained their leader-

84. No study has been made of the role of the more or less pure country peers in local affairs. It is evident that a peer like Robert Rich, 2nd Earl of Warwick, exercised large if not paramount power in Essex. To the south in Kent, however, affairs seem to have been in control of a gentry oligarchy, and just to the north the gentry dynasty of the Barnardistons with Sir Nathaniel as its head dominated Suffolk.

ship in Parliament. This leadership was only occasionally and not very effectively challenged by a few members of the country gentry. The efforts of this cluster of men were indeed often, and not necessarily by design, frustrated by the readiness of some of the court peers and gentry to assume a mediatorial rather than an intransigent posture as between current royal policy and country misgivings about it, misgivings which they sometimes shared in part.

The set of relations among those who ruled England, just described, was remarkably effective in maintaining conditions of internal repose. It was also capable of absorbing the impact of Puritanism in its current form and state of development. For more than a decade before 1588, the program of the Puritan ministers had aimed at the substitution of Presbyterianism for episcopal government in the church, at revision of the liturgy to eliminate "Popish" elements, at congregational power over church discipline, and at an extension and better performance of preaching of the Word. Unsuccessful maneuvers to achieve the first three goals had absorbed a large part of the energy and talent of the Puritan ministry. Those goals had elicited some support from peers and gentry both at court and in the country. But in face of the Queen's intransigent opposition, they had not evoked enough enthusiasm from a large enough group anywhere to polarize the governing classes along the lines set by religious issues.

While the Puritan ministry was frustrated in its ecclesiological, liturgical, and disciplinary designs, Puritan gentry and peers were not cut off from positions of honor and power either in the country or at court. On the contrary, the Queen's long-time favorite, the Earl of Leicester, her principal Secretary of State, Sir Francis Walsingham, and a very considerable number of court peers and gentry acted as protectors and advocates for the Puritans. Indeed in Parliament itself, where Puritan country gentry found an occasional opportunity to press for one item or another of the program of the Puritan ministry, they often received open support from highly placed peers and gentlemen of the court. This open court-country alliance of Puritans did not budge the Queen's effective resistance to Puritan demands; on the other hand, it did not reduce the zeal of the court Puritans for the royal service or result in the withdrawal of royal favor from them or in any concerted action against them by the Queen and the supporters of her ecclesiastical policy. The result was that Puritanism had a diffusive rather than a polarizing impact on the English governing class and did not

jeopardize its relatively easy and smooth functioning. Under the circumstances of the 1580s religious divergence did not exacerbate the tendency of court and country to polarize into two cultures incompatible and at loggerheads with each other, unable either to communicate effectively across the gulf between them or to unite their energies in a joint enterprise. The viability of the peculiar social pattern just examined was fully vindicated by effective coordination of the ruling class in court and country at the time of the Armada crisis.[85]

The passage of forty years witnessed noteworthy changes in the patterns of relations within the social matrix of the ruling class. Increase in the number of peers and especially increased readiness to reward service in high court office with peerages automatically enhanced the power of the court peers. This dual process correlatively and inevitably diminished the importance and power at court of the court gentry. The diminution of their power at court weakened their position within the county hierarchies. With neither the wealth nor the prestige that four decades earlier their eminence at court had afforded them in the country, they tended to withdraw from activities in which they no longer could hope to receive the respect and "worship" that their predecessors had enjoyed. This decline in status and power became markedly evident in the incapacity of the court gentry to lead that assembly of the upper country gentry, the House of Commons. In the county hierarchies the influence of the court peers did not expand proportionally to the shrinkage of the influence of the court gentry there; if anything, to the contrary. The inflation of peerage honors created a fatal dichotomy between legal right of precedence on the one hand and respect, worship, and effective power in the actual workings of the county hierarchies on the other. The latter increasingly went to those who actually did the work — the more assiduous deputy-lieutenants and justices of the peace, painstaking in their attendance at musters, quarter sessions, and petty sessions. Neither court peers nor country peers exercised much control over these rulers of the countryside, whose power and influence depended on local estimates of merit and worth that increasingly diverged from the canon for advancement at court.

By 1628 communication between the country gentry and the court, which forty years earlier had proceeded smoothly, was

85. The contrast between the situation of France and England in this respect emerges in stark and dramatic vividness from the pages of Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (Boston, 1959).

hopelessly snarled. No analysis of the sort favored by Stone can quite do justice to the circumstances that raised the misunderstanding and cross-purposes between the court on one side and the country gentry on the other to the crisis level, where what one regarded as communication the other deemed irrelevant and intolerable noise. Month by month, year by year, for a quarter of a century, while alienation from the country and contempt for the tastes and modes of both perception and valuation current there increased at court, misgiving, doubt, distrust, and detestation of almost everything that began in and emanated from the court rose among the country gentry. The accentuation of mutual distrust started with the accession of James or perhaps a little before.[86] It was more intense in 1615 than it had been in 1603. With the accession of Buckingham, aside from one brief, adventitious respite of good will that followed the breakdown of negotiations for the Spanish match in 1624, the force of the flood of anger grew. At the dissolution of Parliament in 1629, it culminated in a sort of collective rage of mutual frustration and bitterness. Such a process can best be presented not in analytical but in narrative form. The story itself becomes the explanation of the series of events it recounts. Only when one follows those events in chronological sequence does one acquire a sense of the cumulative fury that was creating the situation of the later 1620s when the court and country hierarchies no longer adequately understood what the other was saying, because in matters of the utmost importance to both they had practically ceased to speak the same language.

The breakdown of understanding between the court and the local gentry hierarchies coincided with and was in fact the occasion for a most significant development of intercommunication among the local hierarchies of country gentry. By 1628 that communication had markedly increased in quantity and improved in quality. The improvement in quality was assisted by the improvement and intensification of the education of the upper gentry. In the universities and at the Inns of Court, more of them received a training that was both longer and better suited to their needs than it had been. The improvement was also a function of an improved information network. Pitifully meager no doubt by present-day standards, the growing volume of newsletters flowing

86. Some of the debates in the later Elizabethan Parliaments over issues not specifically related to religion suggest the earlier date. So does the extraordinary and rapid response of the House of Commons, beginning on the very first day of James's first Parliament, evoked by the case *Goodwin vs. Fortescue.*

from London to the country provided the county hierarchies of the 1620s with a larger body of shared information (and misinformation) about current events in the great world than their predecessors of the 1580s received. The increase in volume of intercommunication among the county hierarchies was itself a consequence of their better education and better information; men communicate more when they know more to communicate about. Above all, however, the impulse to create means of intercommunication among the country gentry across county lines derived from the common sense of a need for it. The need was the result of the divergence of outlook, opinion, and judgment between the court and the upper country gentry on an ever broader range of issues. Obligingly, though under some duress, the court itself nurtured in the leaders of the counties an awareness of how fully they shared common views on major matters and provided them with opportunities for communication unparalleled in Elizabeth's reign. In the five Parliaments that James and Charles summoned between 1621 and 1628, the greater country gentry from all over England met and worked together, day in and day out, in the House of Commons. There they unconsciously constructed a collective representation of a common enemy, the court, which temporarily obliterated all the latent divergencies in their own views.

These circumstances did not make the country gentry Puritan; about 1628 some were Puritans, some were not. To identify some country gentry who clearly were Puritan at the time is not hard; to identify many who clearly were not is more difficult unless they enthusiastically took part in or supported Archbishop Laud's measures of ecclesiastical policy; and such men were few. The transformation in Puritanism itself is what makes it hard to define the boundary zone between Puritan and mere (anti-Laudian) Protestant in the late 1620s.

Like its antecedent in this matter, Christian humanism, Puritanism slowly re-educated the English landed classes and reoriented and inflated their expectations both of themselves and of others. This reorientation touched many aspects of human existence. It especially touched public life. Puritanism did not create the idea of such a life; some such notion had begun to re-emerge in the Middle Ages and received further specification during the Renaissance. But for many Puritanism gave a new and special poignancy to their conception of the purpose of public life. It set the goal of that life very high, no less than the *regnum Christi*, the kingdom of God on earth, where His will should be done. With so exalted

an end, Puritanism made very severe demands on those who took part in ruling the English commonweal, the Elect Nation of God, the cynosure of the faithful everywhere, "as a City on a Hill." There office should be precatory rather than predatory, for prayer not for prey, a dedication rather than an exploitation.

The spread of this sense of the nature of public life was slow and sporadic.[87] The propagation of the Puritan view of the right quality of life, even the effective and detailed formulation of that view, were the consequences of a paradox. They owed much to Elizabeth and James I who opposed, frustrated, and defeated the Puritans in the arena of ecclesiastical politics. From the 1570s to the first decade of the seventeenth century, the Puritans tried to impose their ecclesiological and liturgical views on the English Church by exerting pressure at court indirectly through Parliament and directly through friends in the Queen's Council and near her person. Their successive defeats gradually diverted the energies of many Puritans from the divisive issues of the one right government and form of worship for the church. Puritans were also deprived of access to the responsibilities and ambiguities of power and, from the late sixteenth century on, turned their main effort toward the ministry and molding of conscience. In this range of activity the central authorities failed effectively to restrain the spiritual brotherhood from propagating a version of the gospel increasingly in conflict with the ethical outlook of the court.

With declining hope of access to power through the court and an increasingly well-defined opposition to the way of life, the ethic, the ordering of values characteristic of the court, the Puritan ministry zealously sought a welcome for its message among leaders of the county hierarchies who dominated life in the country. By that time the spiritual brotherhood of godly ministers in England was no longer so overtly or intensely committed as it had been to a program that required a remodeling of the whole ecclesiastical structure and therefore the support of the authority of the Crown. In 1641 that ministry again turned its attention directly to the divisive problems of church government. In the interval between the successful repression of the Presbyterian movement by Elizabeth and Archbishop Whitgift and its re-emergence in the early days of the Long Parliament, the principal concerns of the godly

87. Its earliest embryonic expression in England was perhaps pre-Reformation. There are elements of it, at least, in Thomas More's *Utopia*, with the appropriate Christian overtones but, of course, without the emotional charge generated by the conflict with Popery, and without the special rhetoric that that conflict engendered.

clergy had become the effective ministry of the Word, the cultivation and sensitizing of Christian consciences, and propaganda against the Popish resurgence at home and abroad, preoccupations which the Puritans shared with a very large segment of the country gentry. These shared preoccupations make it hard for us at three centuries' distance to identify lay Puritans and may have made it hard at the time for some men to be clear in their own minds whether they were Puritan or not. The new direction of thrust of Puritan thought and action after political defeat by Elizabeth thus encouraged the symbiosis between Puritanism and the country gentry and afforded to the Puritan laity opportunities for leadership in the country that they had lost at court.

The favorable circumstances, partly accidental, partly the fruit of policy, that in the 1580s enabled the court so to manage the Puritans as to enjoy the benefits of their energy and intelligence without having to suffer their domination, ceased to exist. By the 1620s the Puritans for practical purposes were out of court in fact and in hope. They had no place to turn but to the country and primarily to the country gentry. Beyond all other issues uniting the country gentry and dividing them from the court in the 1620s was the one that had bound court and country together in the 1580s — the posture of the Elect Nation in its relation to a beleaguered international Protestantism on the Continent and in the face of a victoriously resurgent Popery. In the present context, discussion of the shortcomings of the views current among the country gentry on such complex matters, of the inadequacy of their understanding, of the irrationality of their response is irrelevant. Whether under the circumstances any policy that the Government attempted to follow could have succeeded, whether the country gentry had the faintest notion of viable alternatives to the succession of cul-de-sacs into which James and Charles plunged, does not matter. What does matter is that everything the Stuarts tried failed and that, as the decade passed, responsibility for failure rested ever more clearly on the Duke of Buckingham. And all this concurred in time with the suspicion that he was responsible for most of the doings at court that annoyed, alarmed, and shocked the country gentry, and with his evident responsibility for many of them. The diffuse but fervent international Protestantism of the larger and richer part of the country gentry had at its hard core the zeal of the Puritan gentry. The anguished cry "Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered Saints!" was wrung from a Puritan heart at a later time, but some of the emotion it reflects — pity for the

continental Protestant victims and hatred for their Popish tormentors — was common to the Puritan clergy, the Puritan gentry, and the mere Protestant gentry of the country of the 1620s. And in the 1620s that emotion was powerfully magnified by impotent rage at the paralysis of English policy and by hysterical dread of the inroads of Popery at home, especially at court. Men who a couple of decades earlier would not have much troubled themselves to act in behalf of the ministers ejected for resistance to the canons of 1604 had little patience with attacks on preachers whose offense was zeal in denouncing doings that they themselves deplored, doings which in appearance and often in fact were generated and consummated at court.

How much of the Puritan ethic forced its way into the hearts of the country gentry by the way of a widely shared concern for the perils of Protestantism is hard to know and hard to find out; but it is scarcely an accident that Richard Baxter, who was well enough aware that he was a dissenter after 1660, did not know that he was a Puritan before the 1640s. It is at least likely that involvement in the care and feeding of zealous preachers of the Word absorbed into the Puritan lay fellowship a part of the gentry which had hitherto stood outside it. It also provided new means and new motives for intercommunication of the gentry hierarchies. Favorite preachers among the lecturers established lines of communication between the gentry of different counties; so too did the need to protect them from harassment directed from the court. Finally, bonds of friendship, reinforced by a shared religious outlook originating in the several Puritan-dominated colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, carried over among the Puritan gentry after college days. The seeds for the dense growth of interrelations among the Puritans in the country, so easy to discern in the 1630s, were sown some decades earlier and matured very fast in the favorable climate of the 1620s. Puritanism, then, advanced the consolidation of the country gentry, broadened the "credibility gap" that isolated the court from the country, and intensified the nationwide crisis of the 1620s.

Supposing the foregoing description of the transformation of the political scene in about four decades to be reasonably accurate, adequately to document it would require years of work in published sources, national and local archives, and private muniments. An early study of mine sought to lay bare the intricate links of cousinship that, regardless of county lines, bound several Puritan "families" of cousins and clients into a sort of Mafia of

saints.[88] A letter from a devout dowager to Sir Simonds D'Ewes about her step-grandson, Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston, the leading gentleman and leading Puritan in Suffolk, further illustrates the transvaluation of values that took place in the days of the early Stuarts:

> Let me desire you further this bearer Mr. Burrell, the late and to my sence the yet minister of Wratting, if Sir Nathan:B:bee as I hope he is earnest to have him restored as well to liuing as libertye. You may out of your interest in him and respect towards him in direct tearmes let him know that he will suffer much in the opinion of his country neighbors here in these parts, many looke upon the success of this business, and surely as this man specd Sir Nath wilbe censured if it be not fully evidenced to them that he desired and indevoured to have him restored to both. The name of Barnardiston is and ever shalbe precious to me: and if any of that name, especially the Luster of the house, should undergoe justly any tart censure or insurre an harde conceit amongst his neighbors, and those of the best ranke according to Gods account, it would even much devert me, in these my declining dayes. Therefore at my intreatie be verie earnest about this desire of myne, and of this I am confident: that the work will be acceptable to god, and bring much comfort to your own conscience, which that it may doe shalbe the earnest desire.[89]

What survives of older days and older ways in Lady Anne's letter is the intense concern for "the name of Barnardiston" and "the luster of the house." This depends on the place of the head of the house, Sir Nathaniel, in the county hierarchy. That place ultimately depends on "the opinion of his country neighbors." That opinion itself, however, is no longer to be won by any of the marks of favor that the court can lavish on a country man. On the contrary, it is to be won by an act of quiet but manifest subversion, in which Sir Nathaniel restores to his living a Puritan minister displaced by the clerical faction favored at court. And finally beyond court favor, the older complex measure of earthly status in the country — an amalgam based on broad acres, a loyal tenantry, riches, and ancient lineage — is made yet more intricate by dependence on the approval of a rather special reference group, a

88. J. H. Hexter, *The Reign of King Pym* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942), pp. 84-88.

89. BM, Anne Barnardiston to Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Jan. 1641, Harl. MSS, 384, fol. 27. This document came to my attention through Kenneth Shipps. I hope and expect that Shipps's doctoral dissertation on the relations between the clergy and laity in early Stuart East Anglia will firm up or blow up some of the framework above outlined. Meantime, I thank him for permission to publish this letter.

new kind of hierarchy, *"those of best rank according to God's account,"* an account not wholly accessible short of Judgment Day.

The crisis of aristocracy was in part a correlate of this broader crisis which caught the peerage in a cross fire from which there was no escape. In the first place, the polarization between the court and the country gentry destroyed the capacity of the peers corporately and individually to play the mediatorial role in which they were cast by Elizabethan policy. There was no way for them to harmonize the signals of discontent and disaffection that came up to them from the country with the demands for unquestioning trust and compliance that came down to them from the court. What was true of their activity was equally true of their mode of life. It had been hard enough to maintain a viable pattern of behavior appropriate to both court and country in the sixteenth century before the demands of the two so completely diverged. In the 1620s it was almost impossible. No peer who maintained the style of life at court under Charles I that the Earl of Leicester did under Elizabeth could have gained and retained leadership of the Puritan-country "coalition." The Puritan-country ideal of zeal, sobriety, austerity, and indifference to earthly rewards was not congenial to the court; even less so were its practice of sanctimony and plain speaking and its distaste for ceremony. The courtier's ideal of grace, urbanity, and cultivated hedonism was not congenial to the Puritan-infested county hierarchies; even less so were its practice of and, worse, its tolerance of idleness, display, flattery, gambling, fornication, adultery, and sodomy. These ancient sports were surely not unknown in the country, but there they carried penalties in terms of power or at least exacted that hypocrisy which is vice's tribute to virtue. At the very time when court and country demands on the aristocracy so sharply diverged, the inflation of peerage from 1618 to 1628 injected into that body a large increment of members without much inclination to the country ideal or practice. Their aptitudes such as they were seemed to lie in the direction of the court ideal and especially of court practice.

What has been said helps to provide an answer to the third problem posed early in this study: why did the members of the upper gentry rather than of the peerage assume the positions of leadership in "the general crisis of the seventeenth century, 1618-1641" in England? There were, of course, perforce or by choice a considerable number of country peers. Some, however, were dis-

qualified for leadership by religion; they were overt or crypto-Catholics, and their religious attachment opposed them to the partly Puritan and wholly anti-Catholic leadership of the upper gentry. Many of the rest were too insignificant to cut much of a local figure. But worst of all, it may be suspected, most of them were too stupid. Inheritance of title is not a very satisfactory predictor of political talent, certainly not to be compared to ability, energy, and dedication to duty and to acquisition of power. These latter traits, not merely wealth and legal status, inherited or granted by court favor, were required of those who worked their way up or held on to their places in the highly competitive, quasi-meritocracies of the counties. Not only were the peers pulled apart by the divergence of expectations between court and country analyzed above; they were also trapped by the rising demand for competence on the country side, as the need for experience, knowledge, ability, and aptitude for countermaneuver against court policy increased. In this crisis situation, in comparison with the upper country gentry, the peers who cast in with them were relatively deficient in talent, training, experience, and number. In this situation they found their place beside rather than above, as collaborators with rather than leaders of, the disaffected gentry.

So much emerges by refining and slightly altering the focus on data, almost all of which can be found in *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*. But at the very outset of his book, by declining to consider the peers as a corporate body, members of the House of Lords, Stone separates the crisis from the political collapse of the House. On purely historical grounds the procedure is hard to justify;[90] it is like putting asunder whom, if not God, at least English public law had long since joined. It was a joining that surely affected the positions of the peers individually as well as collectively between 1559 and 1641, for after all an important element in the prestige and the power of every individual peer was the prestige and power of the corporate body of which he was a proud member. And in the general crisis that took shape from 1618 on, that corporate body had a lot going against it. Specifically, it ran athwart the statistics and mathematics of the peerage in Parliament. The details of those statistics would require close, almost daily, examination as the crisis moved from one issue to another in Parliament, which after all was where much of the action was or

90. Stone could well justify it on other grounds: that enough — or fourteen years' work — is enough. I would heartily agree.

at least where it ended up being. However, a simple and rough computation at an arbitrary date about 1641 makes the gross outlines evident enough. It goes like this:

	150	total peers *ca.* 1641
	76	majority of peers
minus	26	bishops
	20	Catholic peers
		safe for the King
leaving	30	non-Catholic lay peers required for court majority
i.e.	24%	of total lay peers (124) required for court majority (30÷124=24%)

It is possible, of course, that the country gentry who led the House of Commons never made so crude a computation. But in parliamentary matters they were anything but stupid men; if they did not make it, it is because of its crudity not because of their excessive moral sensibility or of defective political awareness and intelligence. Some such calculation clearly preceded the bill to exclude bishops from the upper house in 1641. It would be a little surprising if the leading members of the House of Commons did not explicitly or intuitively strike a series of trial balances substantially rather like the one above on issue after issue in the Parliaments from 1621 on.[91] For them the House of Lords, like a lady of easy virtue, was often in demand, usually available, but never wholly to be trusted.

A theory which treated the peers in Parliament as an aristocracy holding the balance of the constitution between monarchy (the king) and democracy (the House of Commons) had been propounded in Elizabeth's day. It vanished under the early Stuarts.[92] James I and Charles I were disinclined to regard their own powers in a light so unflatteringly secular and potentially restrictive. And although they had no theory of their own that would break the

91. That politically passive busybody, John Chamberlain, was already counting the votes of the bishops in the Addled Parliament of 1614. There are subsequent intimations of awareness in the House of Commons of the influence of the court "bloc" in the House of Lords, and in crucial matters it was clear that the bishops provided the court with the controlling votes in the upper house in the Short Parliament. C. H. Firth, *The House of Lords during the Civil War* (London, 1910), pp. 36, 48, 66.

92. As late as 1607, with surprising docility, the House of Commons swallowed without protest the Earl of Northampton's view that only the upper house was institutionally qualified to deal with "matters of state" such as foreign affairs. As representatives of purely local interests, he alleged, the House of Commons was institutionally disqualified, regardless of any accidental qualifications of some of its members in such matters. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

deadlock that had developed between them and the court, the Puritan-country political calculators had no inclination to a theory that awarded to the peers, who sat in Parliament solely by virtue of birth, of royal caprice, or of flat cash payment, a voice as authoritative as that which the Commons claimed as representatives of the communities of England and held as a result of the superior intelligence of their leaders. In effect, from the 1620s to 1642 the peerage ran into a kind of situation that recurred in 1827-32 and 1906-11; in their corporate capacity they did not appear as a body that did nothing in particular and did it very well, but as a body peculiarly constituted in existing circumstances to do something in particular and do it badly. The addition of this political element to the others that Stone deals with either definitely or diffusely increases the intelligibility of the crisis of the aristocracy.

It also calls attention to one of the most annoying perplexities of the period – the ultimate revival of the prestige of the aristocracy. At the Restoration the peerage regained political effectiveness after a decline and fall lasting four decades or more. The gradual absorption into the pattern of political orthodoxy of that theory of mixed government by King, Lords, and Commons to which both court and country were inhospitable under the early Stuarts was a symptom of this revival. This first perplexity is simply a part of a still broader perplexity that has afflicted many historians of the period, a certain uneasiness about the English Revolution when viewed as one of the series of great revolutions in the Western World – the Reformation, the English, the American, the French, and the Russian Revolution. On analysis this uneasiness seems to have two components, one historiographic or mythographic, the other more strictly historical. The historiographic grounds for uneasiness are so well documented as to be scarcely arguable. In the patterns in which whole peoples think of their past, 1517, 1776, 1789, and 1917 appear to have an uneradicable place in the collective memory. However historians nowadays or hereafter may evaluate their actual consequences, men very soon afterwards thought of the events of those years as inaugurating a new era, a *novus ordo saeclorum*, and have continued so to think of them to this day. No such thing happened in the English case. If historians today tried to settle on a common date – 1628? 1640? 1649? 1688? – inaugurating the new era in English history, they would be as hard put as if they tried to dislodge those other dates – 1517, 1776, 1789, 1917 – from their time-hallowed places. In at

least one clear sense in which the Reformation, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Russian may be said to have made it, the English Revolution did not make it at all.

The failure of the English people as a whole or any large number of them to enshrine in their hearts the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century drove historians who believed it really was a revolution anyhow to an anxious search for plausible grounds for their conviction. Most of the search was conducted during a time span ill-starred in two respects. First, there was little consensus among historians on what to count as a revolution; yet they suffered from the illusion, at once uncomfortable and unwarranted, that the term was useless unless they could discover or define what a revolution "really" was. Since to discern a common essence in the Neolithic Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, the French Revolution of 1789, and the Revolution of 1830 in the Netherlands requires hallucinatory gifts not granted most historians, the search was on the whole unsuccessful. Second, the search coincided with a growing conviction that to count as a "real" revolution, any lapse of a relatively stable human community into long internecine war involving the disruption, displacement, or alteration of the prime center of accepted authority had to be a social revolution.

Instead of clarifying counsel, this somewhat gratuitous stipulation confused it. It committed historians to the view that all major or big or real revolutions were brought about by and in the interest of particular social classes. By means and as a consequence of each such revolution, the victorious revolutionary class wholly or in part achieved its conscious (or semiconscious) social ends.[93] Its ends always encompassed the increase of its own political and economic power in the community and, as a condition of that increase, the overthrow, subjection, exploitation, and expropriation of other classes. Unfortunately this model makes something less than a perfect fit on any of the revolutions it is supposedly designed for, and on none worse than the English Revolution, on which it hangs in disarray like an ill-designed, ill-cut sack. Historians who have tried to cope with this unhappy situation have not had much luck. The more they work at the problem, the more

93. Consequences *inverse* to the intention of the revolutionaries should not count, for example, bureaucratization in Soviet Russia, Bonapartism in nineteenth-century France, or the increased secularization of politics in England after 1660. These may have been in part consequences of what the revolutionaries did; they were not at all what the revolutionaries wanted.

it appears that the notion that the English Revolution, 1640-60, was not in the foregoing sense a social revolution has something going for it, and that historians who want it the other way have a good bit going against them.

Nothing else is going as badly against them as the actual outcome of the English Revolution *vis-à-vis* the aristocracy. From pretty far back that class seemed destined to be overthrown, expropriated, and suppressed – both the immediate and the ultimate victim of the upheaval. Even before the revolution its prestige and social status had grown shaky. The imperatives that governed the decisions and actions of much of the aristocracy had become irrelevant and even repugnant to other social classes, particularly to those a step or two down the social pyramid.[94] Because so many aristocrats ended as allies and supporters of the Crown, once the revolution broke out, their property was sequestrated, decimated, and in some instances confiscated outright. The large packet of political authority and power once theirs as members of the House of Lords got whittled down in practice until 1649, when it too was wholly confiscated. Finally, all these changes took place over a relatively short time span at the behest of the leaders of the revolution or with their consent and in pursuit of what they deemed their proper purposes. For historians the trouble with the English Revolution is that none of these changes lasts or leaves an indelible impress on the social order.

What makes the English Revolution suspect as a social revolution is the restoration of the peerage economically, politically, socially, and ideologically after 1660. For this is what happened, and what Stone says happened, for which he will earn less than golden opinions from those whose presuppositions require them to believe otherwise. Since, by the criteria of social revolution proposed above, the peers seemed to be marked out to be the losers, the main thrust of history writing from the 1920s to the 1950s was to force them to play the role in which historians cast them. As it actually happened, the peers, who should have been the victims, were the victors. Some peerage families loyal, but not too loyal, to King Charles indeed suffered both during the Interregnum and after from the cost incurred in meeting payment for compounding for the return of their estates to their possession before 1660. Other changes – more flexible mortgage arrangements, improve-

94. For the notion of the fabric of imperatives, see J. H. Hexter, "The Loom of Language and the Fabric of Imperatives: The Case *Il Principe* and *Utopia*," *A.H.R.*, LXIX (1964), 945-68.

ments in the terms of credit, stricter estate settlements – however, improved their situation. Economically the peerage still comprised England's greatest landlords. In a society in which land remained the surest route of access to political consequence, the peers' collective share of landed income appears to have been greater in 1688 than in 1601.[95] After the Restoration individual peers learned better how to use their wealth for political purposes. The day of connectional and interest politics was dawning, when the management of family parliamentary interests combined with access to a share of crown patronage was the key to power, a key that peers inclined to politics were long to manipulate with great success. The high noon of "the Whig oligarchy" was not far off. The political viability of the peers as individuals was complemented by that of the peerage in its constitutional embodiment in the House of Lords. The reinstitution of that House after its abolition during the Interregnum was complete and integral. It was accompanied by the gradual but almost universal acceptance of the theory of mixed government which conferred on the House of Lords the function of "balancing" the constitution, of preventing it from drifting too far in the direction of "mere monarchy" embodied in the king or "mere democracy" embodied in the House of Commons. Finally, the old social hierarchy of deference and place re-established itself. Alexander Pope's celebration of the Great Chain of Being in the Age of Newton was perhaps less grand than Shakespeare's in the Age of Gloriana; nevertheless, it fitted the temper of that later age better. So did the formulations of the contemporary pretensions of the peers to their due place in the social hierarchy (at the top), which was put in civil rather than theological terms. And so in the outcome of the English Revolution, the lordly victims were victors.

One victor in the revolution at least was its victim. The habits of thought associated with it no doubt continued to form the characters of many Englishmen, but at the Restoration Puritanism had lost its power to define the expectations of the politically effective classes. After 1660 not many Englishmen in a position to exert strong political pressure brought it to bear in the service of the aspirations once evoked by conceptions like the Elect Nation, the Holy Commonwealth, the Rule of the Saints, and the New Jerusalem. The moral climate of politics had undergone an abrupt change, becoming in the process considerably less rigorous. In

95. The worst that can be said for the estimates of Thomas Wilson (1601) and Gregory King (1688) is that they provide no ground for believing otherwise. The estimates are given in Stone, *Crisis*, App. XII, p. 767.

twenty years of power the Saints had failed and failed and failed again to construct viable foundations for the Government of England, and as a major political force Puritanism itself was buried in the rubble of their failures. They had proved unable to rise to the level of their own demands, and so in the interest of a workable civil order, the expectations of their rulers that the Puritans had entertained and taught others to entertain had to be scaled down.[96] One effect of this reduction of expectations was to relieve the peers of some of the impossible demands for austerity of political conduct and dedication to selfless ends that they failed to meet before 1640. Such an austerity and dedication, unrelated or potentially adverse to their individual and corporate interests, are extremely rare in the members of any group and are scarcely to be dreamed of in a group created by the principles of selection governing the English peerage.

After 1660 the peers were also relieved of the second impossible demand that faced them from the 1620s to the 1640s, a demand for levels and kinds of competence quite beyond their reach, though well within the reach of the combined talents of the upper gentry and great lawyers, the group from which the bulk of the House of Commons was chosen. By the quite intelligible deficiency and default of the peerage, this group had been left to meet and did meet the central crisis of the age, the crisis of the constitution. Again this crisis abated somewhat at the Restoration and yet more at the Revolution of 1688, and with it abated the almost continuous demand for high skill as well as for Puritanical fervor that the crisis had evoked before 1640. Once the upheavals subsided, the House of Lords could get along quite comfortably "with no pretence of intellectual eminence or scholarship sublime." In addition to the powers of adaptation that the peerage displayed, to which Stone does full justice, it was this double lowering of expectation and demand that brought the English aristocracy out of the turbulence of the early seventeenth century and the catastrophes of its middle decades into the quieter waters beyond. The accommodation was after all mutual — an adaptation of the aristocracy to a changing society, but also an adaptation of the demands of that society to what the aristocracy had a capacity to supply.

To say that the English Revolution was not in any clearly in-

96. The trajectory of expectations could probably be traced with reasonable accuracy by a study of the successive terms of political settlements proposed or deemed acceptable by the various Puritan groups, excepting only small clusters of apocalyptic chiliasts.

telligible sense a social revolution is not to say that it was trivial. An eruption that kept England in turmoil for twenty years cannot be thus casually written off. Beyond that, it did settle, perhaps more effectively than its surviving leaders thought when the Restoration came, several important political issues that were in doubt as late as 1640. How completely it settled them was not altogether evident until the foolish younger son of the revolution's most eminent victim stumbled into an attempt to alter the terms of settlement. To his loss James II learned how firmly fixed were the boundaries to the authority and power of the king of England.

With respect to the problems that the term "revolution" poses for historical discourse, a contemplation of the result of the crisis of the English aristocracy in the seventeenth century is most instructive. It suggests that the term sometimes may be sensibly applied to upheavals which did not permanently alter the distribution of wealth, the control of the means of production, or the structure of society, and which only modified but did not subvert the prior organization and distribution of political power. In the general upheaval in England between 1640 and 1660, one can discern a religious revolution that first succeeded and then collapsed, the Puritan Revolution; a political revolution that succeeded and then collapsed, the republican revolution; and a potential socio-political revolution that flared up briefly but did not succeed, the Leveller movement. To deny that those twenty years were an era of revolution would seem to entail an excessive austerity in the use of the term, or to impose gratuitously the rather unreasonable restrictive covenant that only revolutions that were ultimately successful shall count as revolutions, which leaves one with no term to apply to the many revolutions that have not succeeded. It is even more arbitrarily restrictive to apply the term only to those upheavals the consequences of which were permanent drastic alterations in the structure and the functioning of society. And it is an act of desperation to bend and twist the evidence in order tightly to bind such upheavals to major long-run social changes to which at best they were linked casually and tangentially. In the case of the English Revolution, some scholars have engaged in such distortions in order to force that revolution to fit a simplicist model of the over-all development of Western or world civilization. The motive is intelligible, but the result is rarely commendable.

Equally intelligible but even less commendable is the peculiar psychological quirk that causes some historians to identify their

own achievement with the magnitude or success or "importance" in the past of the events and affairs that engage their attention. There is after all no evidence whatever that merely by choosing a "big subject," a historian adds a cubit to his stature. Nor is there evidence that for the understanding of the past the investigation of failure is less rewarding than the exploration of success. The measure of a historian is not the importance in the past of what he chooses to write about, but the importance of what he writes about it, which is a very different thing. Of this the book here so closely scrutinized is the best proof. It may be hard or impossible to evaluate the over-all importance in the past of two crises, both of relatively brief duration, in the affairs of some of the 382 men that constitute the English peerage from 1558 to 1641. That a history written about those men seen in the framework of those crises can be important indeed, Lawrence Stone has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt. He has done so in the most convincing way possible — by writing about them one of the most important historical works of the past quarter century — "a milestone," "a landmark," a monument.

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